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Cinead McTernan

Cinead is an editor and author of two books. She lives in Bristol with her husband and son and visits the garden at Trellissick on page 22.



Richard Bloom

Richard was recently crowned International Garden Photographer of the Year 2016, and photographed bulb expert Rod Leeds' garden on page 31. He has more than 20 years experience.



Christopher Grey-Wilson

Christopher is an alpine expert and author. He edits the Alpine Garden Society's Journal and holds the RHS Victoria Medal of Honour. He picks his top 10 alpinists on page 75.



Welcome...

April is a strong contender for my favourite month of the year, when shrubs and trees start to burst their buds and their bare branches are gradually covered by delicate, almost translucent young leaves offering a haze of colour in subtle tones that speak of optimism and a fulsome season ahead.

It's when the earliest bulbs are joined by later-flowering daffodils, and rhododendrons and azaleas are adorned with vibrant blooms. At *Trellissick* in Cornwall, staggering specimens give this wooded valley garden timeless appeal. Its scale is in stark contrast to the garden at *Chestnuts*, the Suffolk home of renowned bulb author Rod Leeds, which is a showcase for spring's smallest delights.

Fans of a relaxed approach to gardening will love *Shandy Hall* in north Yorkshire, former home of 18th-century novelist Laurence Sterne. Brush up on your literature; the garden is peppered with references to Sterne's work. Meanwhile, take a history lesson at *Little Malvern Court* in Worcestershire, an impressive garden that boasts the ruins of a 12th-century priory within its walls, alongside magnificent magnolias, ancient topiary and much more.

Clare Foggett, Editor



ON THE COVER

Bluebells and forget-me-nots make a frothy foil for colourful tulips, emerging between fresh leafy clumps of perennials.



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“The water is amazing, it’s like swimming in silk. We had a couple of dragonflies buzzing past us... you definitely feel you’re one with nature.

There were lots of things we wanted to do to the house but this was the one thing that we felt everybody benefited from. Having the pond has made a big difference to the way we use the garden. We all love it.”

Nigel & Mandy Keene *Basingstoke*

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Printing William Gibbons Ltd, Willenhall, UK

The English Garden (UK issue) ISSN no 1361-2840. Printed in England.



SUBSCRIPTION ENQUIRIES

0844 848 8053

SUBSCRIPTION OFFICE

The English Garden, CDS
Global, Sovereign Park,
Market Harborough,
Leicestershire LE16 9EF,
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Europe and Rest of World:
+44 (0)1858 438854.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

UK £59.50 (13 issues)
Overseas £69.50 (13 issues)

NEWS DISTRIBUTION

Seymour Distribution Ltd,
2 East Poultry Avenue,
London EC1A 9PT, UK.
Tel: +44 (0)20 7429 3667.

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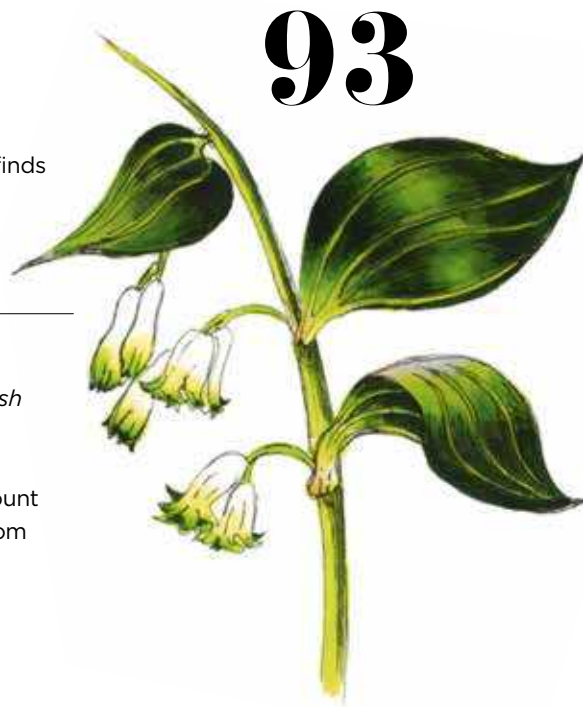
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April

GARDENS TO VISIT



Glorious walks for English bluebells

Spring is in full bloom and thousands of dainty bluebells carpet woodland floors. Here are some great spots to see them

BLUEBELL COTTAGE GARDEN

Ancient woodland adjoins this cottage garden and it brims with spring bluebells. *Bluebell Cottage*, Lodge Lane, Cheshire WA4 4HP. Tel: 01928 713718; www.bluebellcottage.co.uk

BLICKING ESTATE

The 17th-century mansion on this estate is surrounded by scenic woodland and swathes of bluebells. *Blicking Estate*, Norfolk NR11 6NF. Tel: 01263 738030; www.nationaltrust.org.uk/blickling-estate

RENISHAW HALL

Famous for its Italianate gardens, Renishaw Hall also

boasts a tranquil bluebell wood and sublime spring walks. *Renishaw*, Yorkshire S31 9WB. Tel: 01246 432310; www.renishaw-hall.co.uk

CHEDDAR COMPLEX

This captivating bluebell wood in the Mendip Hills is perfect for a family outing, being dotted with other springtime



blooms, too. *Long Wood, Cheddar Complex Nature Reserve*. Tel: 01823 652400; www.somersetwildlife.org

KILLERTON

Native bluebells add a splash of vibrant colour to these spectacular historic gardens. *Broadclyst, Exeter, Devon* EX5 3LE. Tel: 01392 881345; www.nationaltrust.org.uk/killerton

More gardens to see...

Find 20 more bluebell walks at www.theenglishgarden.co.uk. Tell us about your best spots, too. Email theenglishgarden@chelseamagazines.com or tweet @TEGmagazine

NGS Garden of the Month

The Chalet, in Surrey, is a sight to behold in spring when its 55 acres of formal garden and ancient woodland are carpeted with tens of thousands of fragrant daffodils.

The estate boasts an impressive ornamental pond, complete with



koi, and visitors may well spot grazing deer and their fawns, while enjoying a homemade tea on the terrace.

The Chalet opens on Sunday 3 and Sunday 10 April from 11am to 4.30pm. Entry £5, children free. *Tupwood Lane, Caterham, Surrey*, CR3 6ET. Tel: 01483 211535; www.ngs.org.uk



April

PLACES TO GO

Gardens in art

A documentary based on the Royal Academy of Art's landmark exhibition *Painting The Modern Garden: Monet to Matisse* (which runs at the Academy to April 26) will be released in cinemas nationwide from 12 April.

Drawing from the expert knowledge of curators, garden enthusiasts and artists, the film examines the work of Claude Monet and a host of renowned painters in remarkable, rarely seen detail.

Locate participating cinemas by visiting www.exhibitiononscreen.com



Spring festival

Devon's historic Powderham Castle, which dates from 1066, hosts this year's Toby Buckland Garden Festival, which will take place on 29-30 April. The festival is personally organised by nurseryman and broadcaster Toby Buckland and offers garden enthusiasts the opportunity to meet expert growers and industry figures in a friendly and jovial atmosphere.

A broad selection of gardening stalls, practical workshops and edible treats will be present, as well as inspiring guest speakers such as Joe Swift, Christine Walkden and Charlie Dimmock.

Advance tickets £6. For full details, see www.tobygardenfest.co.uk

LOOKING AHEAD: PLANT FAIRS AND SHOWS

RHS LONDON SPRING PLANT EXTRAVAGANZA

1-2 April, London

The RHS Horticultural Halls host this plant fair, which includes the RHS London Orchid Show. Find displays from growers, societies and botanical gardens. Entry £5/£9. www.rhs.org.uk

LANCASHIRE PLANT FAIR

10 April, Lancashire

Unearth everything from

English cottage garden plants to more unusual species at the Hoghton Tower plant fair, open from 11am-3pm. Entry £1. For more details see, www.meadowviewplants.co.uk

ESSEX PLANT HERITAGE SPRING FAIR

16-17 April, Essex

Find a good variety of plants available for purchase from over 30 local nurseries and growers at RHS Hyde Hall.

Refreshments will be available from the on-site restaurant. 10am-4pm. Admission free to RHS members, £11 for non-members. www.rhs.org.uk/gardens/hyde-hall

BIRTLEY HOUSE, RARE PLANT FAIR

17 April, Surrey

This Rare Plant Fair offers a convenient way to source unusual and novel plants for the garden. Refreshments will

be available. 11am-4pm. Entry £4, children under 16 free. www.rareplantfair.co.uk

ROOKWOOD GARDEN FAIR

21 April, Berkshire

Browse over 50 garden and gift stalls and attend expert lectures by well-known kitchen gardener and tutor Polly Wood. 10am-4pm. Entry £5 but specific lectures £10. www.rookwoodgardenfair.co.uk

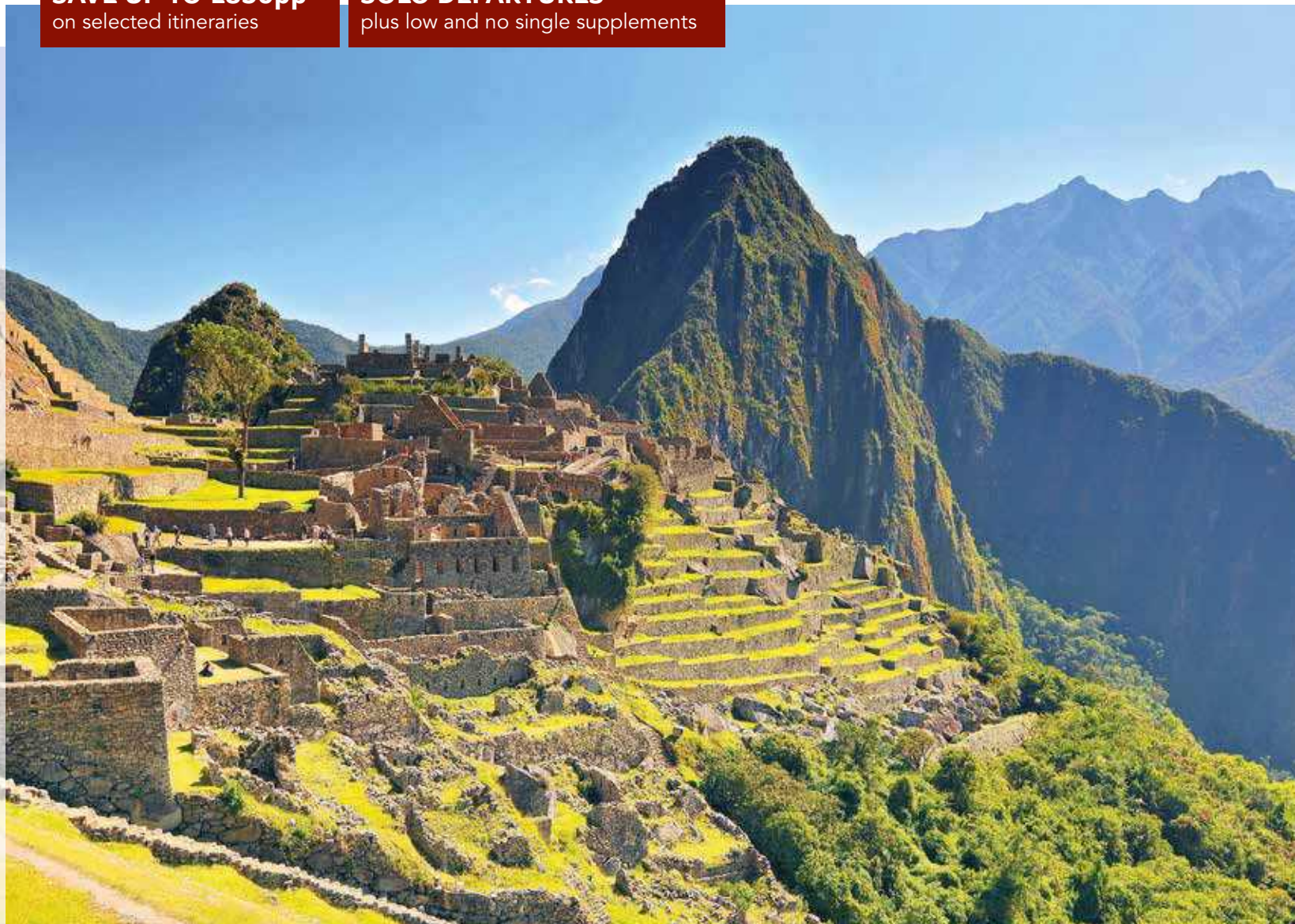
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THINGS TO DO

CREATIVE IDEA

Decorate a vase for spring

Bring the garden indoors and give recycled jars and cans a new lease of life by decorating them with garden finds

What you will need

- *Natural materials: dogwood stems or pieces of gnarly bark, peeled silver birch bark or birch stems*
- *Empty jam jars and cleaned tin cans*
- *Hemp cord or a hot-glue gun*
- *Rubber bands*
- *Spring flowers and foliage: ferns, ivy, periwinkle, primroses*

Instructions

1. Prepare the dogwood stems

Remove a few stems from a dogwood shrub and cut them into short pieces, just slightly taller than the jar. Make enough pieces to cover the whole jar. Attach them using a hot-glue gun if desired but for a more natural approach, use hemp cord. Cut two lengths of hemp, each at least three times the circumference of the jar – you may need them longer depending on the thickness of the stems. Lay out both pieces of cord parallel to each other and place the first stem in the centre. The cords should be roughly 2cm from the top and from



1. Place the cords about 2cm from each end.



2. Work until there is enough to cover a jar.

the bottom of each stem. Take hold of the ends of one cord, bringing them over the stem and tying to secure. Repeat this with the other cord.

2. Create the stem sleeve

Repeat this process with each stem until you have reached the desired circumference for your jar. Secure each end and then tie together to form a sleeve to fit over

the container. Trim protruding stems.

The Crafted Garden: Stylish Projects Inspired by Nature, by Louise Curley, photos Jason Ingram (Jacqui Small, £16.99).



Monthly checklist

- Sow hardy annuals directly where they are to flower, but check the soil is warm to the touch to ensure good germination.
- Gradually start mowing the lawn more regularly, as grass increases its rate of growth in longer, lighter days.
- Chit and plant out first and second early potatoes, followed by salad and maincrop types at the end of the month.
- Sow seed of tender greenhouse crops such as tomatoes, aubergines, chilli and sweet peppers.



- This is the time to pot up dahlia tubers in multi-purpose compost in the greenhouse, to give them an early start on summer flowering. Try growing the brand new semi-cactus dahlia 'Miss Sophie' from specialists Woolmans. Tel: 0845 658 9137; www.woolmans.com



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ITINERARY

Days 1-3. London to Chur. We depart St Pancras International by Eurostar to Brussels where we connect with the high-speed service to Cologne for an overnight stay. We continue to Switzerland on Day 2. We journey across the border via Zürich, joining the superb Swiss railway network. Our destination is Chur, Switzerland's oldest town, for three nights at the Hotel Freieck. Day 3 is free to explore and is the perfect opportunity to discover the area using your included Swiss Card for 50% fares.

Day 4. The Bernina Pass. Today's excursion takes us on the historic Bernina Express past mighty glaciers, rushing mountain streams and Alpine meadows. The line is over 100 years old and has UNESCO World Heritage Status. From Chur we head south, travelling across the Landwasser Viaduct, through the Albula Tunnel and over the Bernina Pass to an altitude of more than 7,000 feet. We begin our descent towards Poschiavo in the Italian-speaking region of Switzerland. We have time for lunch before our return journey.

Day 5. The Glacier Express. We leave Chur today, travelling on the iconic Glacier Express - 'the slowest express train in the world'. Our entire journey is accompanied by typically Swiss scenery as we travel along the Rhine Valley, then over the Oberalp Pass. The final part of our journey takes us to the small town of Brig where we take the local railway to Kandersteg.

Days 6-7. Zermatt & a day at leisure. Today we visit the car-free resort of Zermatt. We join the narrow-

gauge train at Brig, heading south to Visp. From here we join the mountain track for the steep ascent to Zermatt, nestled below the peak of the Matterhorn. On arrival you are free to spend your time as you choose, perhaps take the funicular railway to the summit of the Gornergrat. Day 7 is free to explore this region using your Swiss Travel Card for 50% fares. We particularly recommend travelling along the Rhône Valley to Montreux. From here you can enjoy a cruise on Lake Geneva or join the GoldenPass Line panoramic train. The journey on the Centovalli Railway across 'a hundred valleys' to Locarno on the northern shores of Lake Maggiore is also an excellent choice for today.

Day 8. Return to London. We depart from Kandersteg to Lake Geneva, where we join a direct TGV service to Paris, with the opportunity to see the beautiful scenery along the shores of Lake Geneva and the attractive rolling French hills. After crossing Paris by coach we connect with Eurostar to London.



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16 Apr 16	£1,295	13 Aug 16	£1,345
23 Apr 16	£1,295	27 Aug 16	£1,375
7 May 16	£1,345	3 Sep 16	£1,425
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NATURE TO NOTE



Birdwatch

This month is nesting season for one of Britain's most recognisable garden visitors: the blue tit.

Blue tits have a distinctive blue cap and yellow breast but, in spring and summer, younger birds sport yellow cheeks instead of white cheeks.

The birds nest in April and May so that their chicks will hatch when there are plenty of caterpillars for food.

Cup-shaped and made of a mixture of moss, fur, grass and wool, nests are built by the female of the species, with little or no help from the male.

Help nesting blue tits by leaving out materials such as hair from combs, pet fur and fluff from the tumble dryer, and top up the bird table with food and water. For more information on British birds in your area, visit www.rspb.org.uk

Wildlife ponds

Follow these steps to keep pond water healthy and the frogs happy this month.

- If the pond is overrun with weeds, scoop them out and leave them close by so that helpful insects can make their way back into the water.
- Never move frogspawn into a different pond. This can spread non-native plant species and amphibian diseases.
- Introduce oxygenating plants to the pond to keep the water in good health over summer. Try grassy arrowhead (*Sagittaria graminea*) or water violet (*Hottonia palustris*) for low-maintenance options.

Gather wild garlic

Collect this fragrant plant from woodlands and riverbanks to add to soups, salads and stir-fries

Wild garlic and potato soup

Ingredients

2 tbsp oil for frying
1 onion, chopped
600g potatoes, peeled & diced
1.2 litres vegetable stock
50g wild garlic leaves, shredded
Crème fraîche or cream, to serve
Wild garlic flowers (optional)
Salt & pepper

Method

1. Heat the oil in a large saucepan, then add the onion and fry on a low heat for 8 minutes, until softened without colouring.
2. Add the potatoes and stock. Bring to the boil, reduce the heat and simmer for 20 minutes, until the

potatoes are tender.

3. Add the wild garlic leaves, reserving a few shreds for garnishing the soup.

4. Blitz the potato mixture in a blender or food processor until smooth, with just a few flecks of wild garlic leaves remaining. Reheat in the pan and season to taste.

5. Serve with a swirl of crème fraîche or double cream and a few wild garlic flowers for added interest.

Recipe courtesy of Riverford Farm at www.riverford.co.uk



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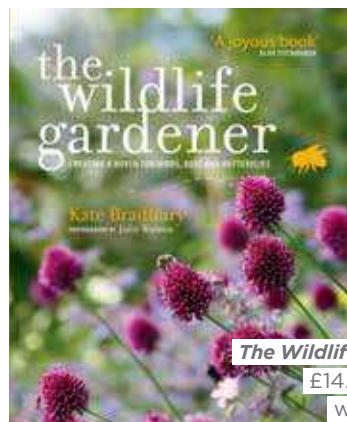
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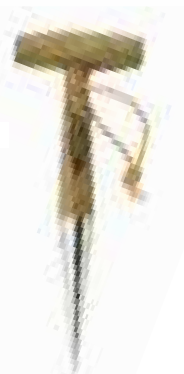
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A Good Heart

Garden designer *Matthew Keightley* reflects on his entry to the profession and creating show gardens for the greater good

My first interest in gardens was very much a subconscious one. Being one of five boys, we were forever playing outdoors in the garden or local parks. It wasn't until further down the line I started to become more spatially aware and appreciate some of the detail that can be seen in nature.

I started doing gardening work for friends and family without deliberately deciding that I would design gardens. I kind of fell into it. In 2002 my parents needed their 20m-long back garden to be redesigned. Although I hadn't yet considered garden design as a viable career path, it seemed natural for me to offer to both design and build it.

My first 'proper' garden design project was for a young family in Chiswick. The garden was about 20m x 8m and had level

changes and outdoor dining areas, with a cohesion between inside and out.

I have been lucky that people have supported me. In 2015 I had the chance to create the Hope in Vulnerability Garden at Chelsea thanks to sponsorship from The David Brownlow Charitable Foundation.

My plans for Hope in Vulnerability had to be submitted before I had visited Lesotho but I could make changes based on what I saw. I was surprised by how much cottage garden style European planting there was in Lesotho. Visiting the place allowed me to use the atmosphere in the camps and spirit of the children in the creative process, so that I could make a space that felt genuine.

The Chelsea Flower Show wasn't on my radar. I designed the Help for Heroes

garden in 2014, the first year I went to the show. I was blissfully unaware of the pressure and stress that there would be. What I had in my favour was day-to-day experience of making gardens on time to budget. All the basic skills of being a good a garden designer stand you in good stead when it comes to Chelsea.

I like the thrill of making a garden that is for more than just the client. In the future I would love to create a garden in the public realm that is permanently open.

I think there is a growing awareness from sponsors that show gardens shouldn't go to waste once the show is over. I always had the permanent site in mind with the Hope on the Horizon Chelsea garden, which lives on at the Help for Heroes Recovery Centre in Colchester.



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A large, leafless tree with a thick trunk and intricate branch structure dominates the left side of the frame. The ground is covered in green grass and numerous small white daffodils. In the background, a calm body of water stretches across the middle ground, with a green, hilly coastline visible on the right. The sky is a pale, overcast blue.

NEAR & FAR

An extensive plant collection at Trelissick, Cornwall, recalls the great Victorian plant-hunting tradition that inspired this historic, park-like garden

WORDS **CINEAD McTERNAN** PHOTOGRAPHS **JASON INGRAM**



TRELISSICK

Set on the banks of the Fal Estuary, Treliissick boasts commanding views of nearby Falmouth and the coast.



DURING THE VICTORIAN period, scores of intrepid plant hunters ventured to remote countries in search of undiscovered exotic plants. Many were privately funded by wealthy landowners with a passion for collecting, some were employed by visionary nursery-owners who anticipated a respectable return on their investment, while others embarked on these expeditions under their own steam. Whichever route led them to those distant shores, the bounty they found had an immediate effect on horticulture, as gentry and the newly emerging middle classes competed to show off these rare and exotic specimens in their own gardens. Incredibly, their legacy can still be seen today, as many of those new introductions are now widely available to gardeners.

It is thanks to this mania that Trelissick, a beautiful 40-acre garden set within 400 acres of sweeping parkland, with views over the Fal river and estuary in Cornwall, was created and remains such an important garden today, under the care of The National Trust. Its ornamental woodlands, huge oaks and conifers can be traced back to the turn

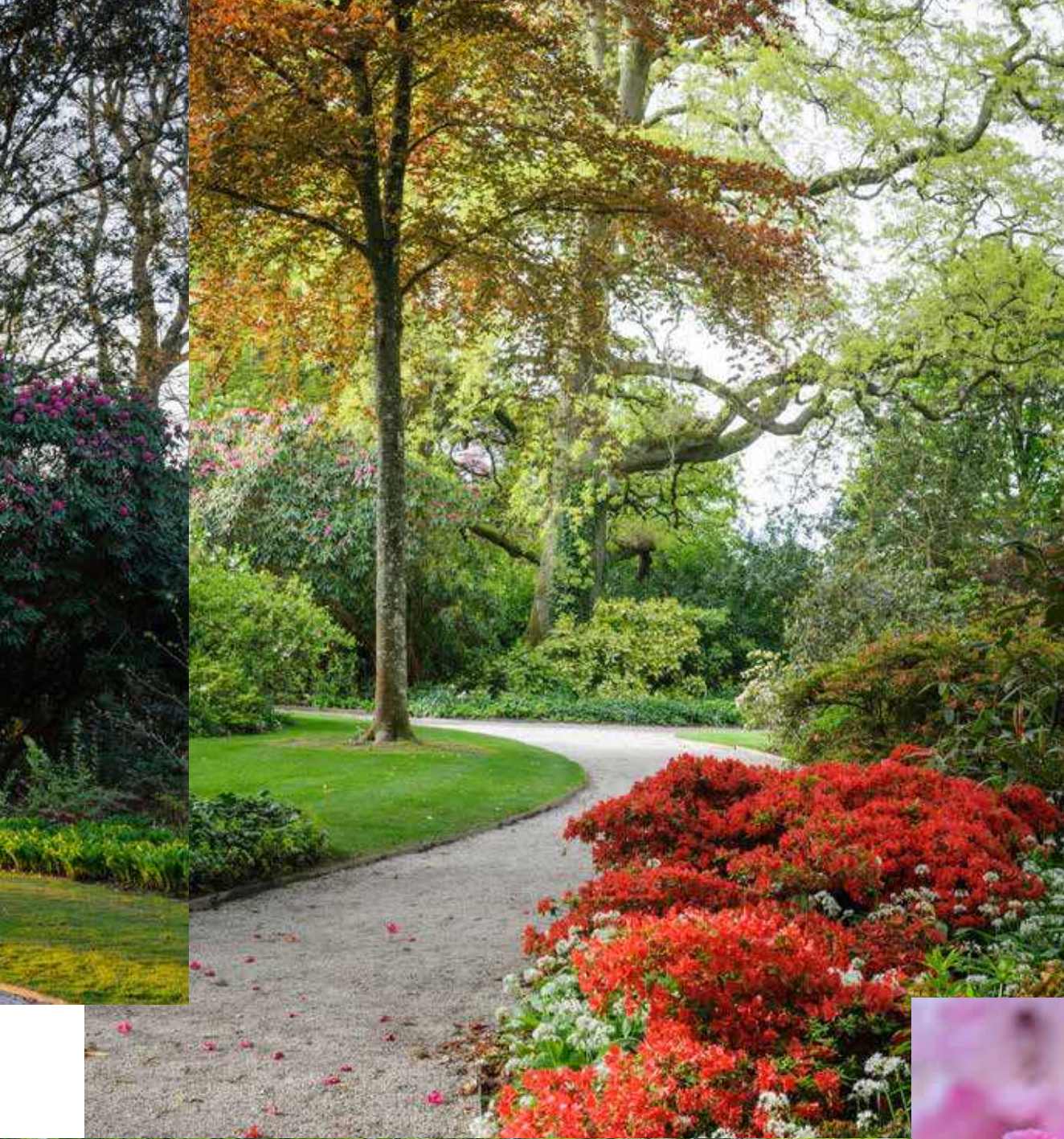
of the last century when its owner – and renowned plant hunter – Carew Davies Gilbert, laid out the garden to display his discoveries. Such was his talent that his work was described in the leading British horticultural periodical, *The Gardeners' Chronicle*, in both 1894 and 1895.

By the 1930s the house was owned by Ida and Ronald Copeland, chairman of Spode-Copeland, the ceramics manufacturer. It was their passion for cultivating exotic specimens, such as ericaeous rhododendrons, camellias and magnolias, suitable for local conditions, that saw the garden develop into a glorious spring woodland paradise. Indeed the china works often used flowers grown on the estate as models for Spode designs.

The couple sought advice and bought specimens from plant specialists in the area and gleaned ideas from neighbouring large estate gardens, like Trewidden and Trewithen, which were creating exceptional pleasure grounds. Camellias came from the nearby Caerhays Estate, owned by the Williams family who had enjoyed a long history of breeding this genus of plants, originally found in parts of Asia, the Himalayas, Japan and Indonesia,

Above A champion specimen of *Rhododendron russellianum* puts on a spectacular show in spring.





Left Awakening trees cast dappled shade over scarlet azalea 'Mrs Woovenboss'.

Below Sugar-pink *Rhododendron arboreum* was given to the Copelands as a wedding gift.

Bottom left Bluebells thrive in woodland soil at Treillick.



finding that they grew very well in the comparably temperate Cornish climate.

Magnolias, such as *Magnolia campbellii* 'Trelissick Alba', *M. dawsoniana* and *M. campbellii* subsp. *mollicomata*, arrived from a nearby nursery that cultivated the large, prolifically flowering Asiatic forms. *Rhododendron* specialists, Mr RE Gill, of Kernick, and the Carelew Woodland Nurseries in Penryn, Cornwall, were the source of particularly important specimens, many of which originated from seeds gathered by the illustrious Victorian plant hunters Joseph Hooker and Frank Kingdon-Ward. From further afield, the Abercrombie family at Bodnant, in north Wales, presented the Copelands with a collection of varieties for their wedding present, including *Rhododendron arboreum*, and the late-flowering hardy variety 'Gwilt King'. This latter variety was said to be a great favourite of Ronald's.

Many of these specimens were planted in The Dell, a perfect spot for these shade-loving plants situated off the main lawn. It was chosen for its topography, which echoed that of a Himalayan temperate forest. To the north of the garden, The Celtic Cross Paths were filled with Asiatic

Right A dense canopy of trees and shrubs in the valley gives the garden an exotic atmosphere.

Below right The estate's former water tower.

Below Cheerful *Rhododendron* 'Golden Flare' with its soft apricot-yellow blooms.





species of large-leaved rhododendrons. The seven-acre arboretum, created on the original site for a south-facing orchard, also provided the perfect spot for specimen trees, including magnolias, and contrasts to the informal woodland style of the main garden.

Sadly, many of these original plants haven't survived. Climatic change, resulting in generally warmer winters and wetter summers in this region, has had a part in damaging plants such as rhododendrons that prefer more predictable conditions and consistently dry air. Stressed and less resilient, they have succumbed to honey fungus and phytophthora, much to the sadness of head gardener, Tom Clarke. Since the garden was donated to the National Trust in 1955, the garden team has replaced them with a combination of heritage and modern varieties, all of which still intrigue visitors with their colourful show early in the season when

SPRING PLANTS AT TRELISSICK

Bursting buds and the best spring bulbs



MAGNOLIAS

"We cultivate several varieties of magnolia at Treliissick," says Tom, "including *Magnolia stellata* with its white, star-shaped flowers and light scent." Hybrids such as 'Serene', 'Iolanthe' and 'Caerhays Surprise' suit frost pockets or gardens because they are later flowering so should avoid frost damage.



WISTERIA SINENSIS

"Our wisteria was planted, we think, when the wall was built in the 1830s," says Tom. "It creates real 'wow' factor when it is in flower, as it is just outside the entrance to the gardens." It is pruned twice a year, in the depths of winter back to a few buds and again in the summer, reducing long tendrils to about 70cm.



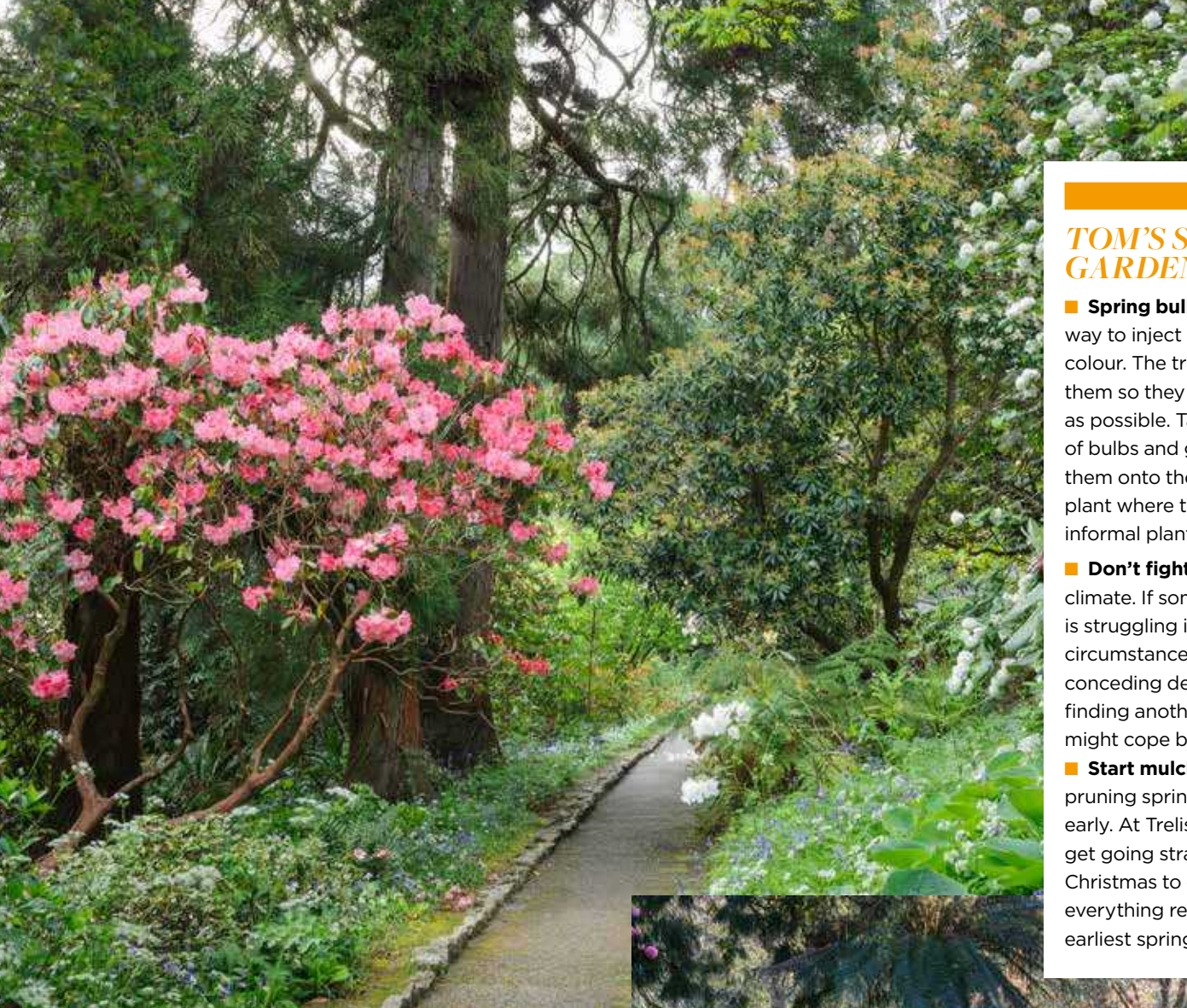
CAMASSIAS

"We have a mix of formal and informal planting and it's important to reflect the style of planting with different types of plant," explains Tom. Camassias are used in both herbaceous borders and grass banks to contrast with daffodils and tulips. They can cope with light shade, so are ideal for a woodland scheme.



FRITILLARIA MELEAGRIS

"Fritillaries are the perfect companions to camassias," says Tom. "They're also a good bulb to naturalise in grass or damp woodland settings." Flowering in April and May, these plants with delicate flowers do well in sun or a little shade, and are worth trying in areas that have high rainfall in spring.



TOM'S SPRING GARDEN ADVICE

■ **Spring bulbs** are a great way to inject a splash of colour. The trick is to plant them so they look as natural as possible. Take a handful of bulbs and gently throw them onto the ground then plant where they fall for an informal planting scheme.

■ **Don't fight** a changing climate. If something is struggling in altered circumstances, it is worth conceding defeat and finding another cultivar that might cope better.

■ **Start mulching** and pruning spring gardens early. At Trelissick, we get going straight after Christmas to ensure we have everything ready for the earliest spring flowers.

little else is in bloom. Under Tom's leadership in the past 15 years, work has continued to develop these collections as well as to restore and revive areas of the garden to cope with new conditions. "It has been an enthralling journey," explains Tom, who is now a passionate devotee of the genus.

With such a rich history, it is not surprising that Tom has followed in the footsteps of the first creator of the garden, Carew Davies Gilbert. He undertakes his own expeditions to gather information about hardier hybrids that might be better suited to the more extreme and unpredictable conditions we may come to expect. "Observing these exotic specimens in their natural habitat is thrilling," he explains. "It is the perfect opportunity to learn more about the genus as well as individual cultivars, which is extremely helpful when it comes to growing them back home in our more challenging climate."

Previous owners of Trelissick would surely approve of Tom's efforts to ensure the wonderful plant collections of this magnificent estate continue to thrive for future generations. ■

Trelissick, Feock, near Truro, Cornwall TR3 6QL. Visit www.nationaltrust.org.uk for opening times and further information.



Top Modern hybrids now thrive among well-established conifers at Trelissick.

Middle Emerald green *Matteuccia struthiopteris* fronds thrust upwards.

Bottom *Viburnum x juddii* has pale pink, scented flowers.



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Vortex. Bronze Resin
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Flight of Keys. Bronze Resin
H: 160cm, W: 150cm, L: 170cm

Anne Curry is a member of the Royal British Society of Sculptors.

Her outdoor sculpture has been exhibited across the UK, and is displayed in gardens on both sides of the Atlantic.
Drawing inspiration from plant forms, she strives to evoke the power of life at work in nature.

Her sculpture can be seen in her own studio and gardens, by appointment only.

www.annecurry-sculpture.co.uk

Every inch of this Suffolk garden is filled with the horticultural delights in the Leeds' plant collection.

GROWING PASSIONS

Pepetual curiosity and a great affinity for cultivating new plants has resulted in a rich variety of material in Rob and Jane Leeds' garden in Suffolk

WORDS **JACKIE BENNETT** PHOTOGRAPHS **RICHARD BLOOM**



Above The sleeper-edged beds in the sunken garden are full to bursting with fresh growth of perennials and early bulbs.

Right Rod and Jane Leeds seek out unusual species – and help run their local AGS.



MOST GARDENERS, AFTER FORTY FIVE years in the same house, might be thinking of hanging up their tools – or at least considering their low-maintenance options.

Nothing could be further from the minds of Rod and Jane Leeds who work an acre of garden known as Chestnuts, in the village of Preston St Mary, near Sudbury in Suffolk.

A retired headteacher, Rod is well known in the world of specialist plants. A former president of the Alpine Garden Society, he is involved with many RHS plant committees and is the author of several books on bulbs, including *The Plantfinder's Guide to Early Bulbs*. Jane, too, has joined Rod, judging for the Alpine Garden Society, running plant days and getting involved in their local branch of the AGS.

Yet, turning the clock back to 1971, when the couple arrived at a derelict thatched cottage in a field of grass with a couple of apple trees, the plant-filled garden we see now was many years away. “We worked on the house first,” says Rod, “but soon I was turning to the garden as a respite after work and I became fascinated with particular groups of plants – especially bulbs.”

A few cyclamen here, a few daffodils there and the collection began. Although the land here has underlying boulder clay, they were lucky with the topsoil, which is a good neutral-to-alkaline loam. These early plantings were soon joined by increasing numbers of snowdrops, anemones, scillas, fritillaries and species tulips, followed by erythroniums, trilliums, hepaticas, and primulas, to name but a few. Their interest was fuelled by their membership of the Alpine Garden Society, where they met fellow growers and nursery people who fuelled their passion for seeking out unusual varieties. “It was John Massey from Ashwood Nurseries who set us off growing hepaticas, for example. He was so enthusiastic, and he’s totally responsible for the fact we grow so many now,” says Jane.

Every part of the garden was put to use, with beds carved out of the turf as they developed new interests and gained knowledge. The south-facing front beds of the house were planted with South African bulbs including nerines and *Amaryllis belladonna*. Cooler, damper areas near the ditch that runs down the west side of the garden were planted with *Narcissus* and ferns such as *Onoclea sensibilis* and *Matteuccia struthiopteris*. Grassy areas were sown with cowslips and wild tulips, while the number of pots, troughs, sinks and raised beds increased with each passing year.

With so many bulbs peaking in the spring months, the most common question visitors to Chestnuts ask is: ‘what happens next?’ Jane is quick to respond. “What happens next is more plants, more bulbs, more perennials. We are a year-round garden.



Top left *Arum creticum* looks striking against a bright sea of purple *Phlox subulata*.

Top right Zingy *Euphorbia characias* subsp. *wulfenii*.

Bottom right Dusky, chequered bells of *Fritillaria orientalis*.

Bottom left Bright *Leucojum aestivum* 'Gravetye Giant'.





Above Unusual North American bulb *Sanguinaria canadensis* f. *multiplex* 'Plena'.

Left Their classic Suffolk cottage makes the perfect backdrop for this garden of treasures.

We love to see things coming out in every month of the year, which is probably why we have increased our range of snowdrops – the earliest, *Galanthus elwesii* 'Barnes', flowers in October.”

In spring, however, there is no doubt that the garden has a special, shimmering vibrancy. Native orchids have colonised the patches of meadow, joining *Fritillaria meleagris* and the true oxlip, *Primula elatior* which can be identified by the way the flowers hang from one side of the stem only. Stems of the fascinating but foul-smelling *Dracunculus vulgaris* emerge from the ground, the *Magnolia stellata* behind the house opens its flowers and the erythroniums and anemones carpet the ground. Through them come some unexpected treasures: the pale yellow bells of *Fritillaria pallidiflora*, mauve faces of *Romulea bulbocodium* 'Jenny Robinson' and the diminutive *Uvularia sessilifolia* 'Cobblewood Gold'.

Spring brings its own challenges, too. With so many plants emerging through the earth, keeping the beds weed free is a relentless task. The worst culprit here is speedwell, but the Leeds also unite in their condemnation of *Tropaeolum ciliatum* – a climbing nasturtium from Chile. “Whoever thought it would be good to sell that plant as an ornamental

SPECIALITY BULBS AT CHESTNUTS

Plant enthusiasts will be inspired by the rare and wonderful varieties on show here



BELLEVALIA FORNICULATA

A member of the muscari family and originally from southern Europe, this bulb is the most striking blue and will flower in April. It's not difficult to grow but likes a well-drained soil. Approximately 20cm high.



FRITILLARIA PALLIDIFLORA

Sometimes known as the Siberian fritillary, this species has a slight speckling on the pale background of its petals and its broad leaves. It will grow to about 30cm tall. Prefers a soil that doesn't dry out in summer.



ROMULEA BULBOCODIUM 'JENNY ROBINSON'

Vibrantly coloured 'Jenny Robinson' is diminutive in size and probably best appreciated in a pot or trough. Give it a well-drained growing medium and a warm position in full sun.



UVULARIA SESSILIFOLIA

One of the prettiest dwarf bulbs, *Uvularia* needs a humus-rich soil and similar conditions to trilliums and other woodland plants. It may be slow to increase but is well worth the trouble. It reaches about 30cm tall.



Top left *Cyclamen repandum* has otherworldly magenta petals.
Top right Delicately flushed with pink: the sumptuous flowers of *Trillium albidum*.
Right Large troughs contain some of the garden's daintiest plants.
Left Flared goblets of tulip 'Hermitage'.



should be brought to justice. It has very pretty leaves and a nice yellow flower. But it literally romps through the beds, spreading by runners and stolons. We wouldn't knowingly plant it again."

The strange, up-and-down weather of the past years has not fazed them. Every climatic peak and trough is treated as an opportunity to trial different plants and to watch how others behave. The wet weather of the past season has benefited some of the damp-loving ferns for example but, Rod says, even in the driest East Anglian weather, *Polypodium* will thrive. Daphnes – which can succumb to cold – are grown both in the greenhouse and outdoors, depending on the particular species.

With an enclosed area housing five greenhouses (all kept at different levels of coldness, from 'cold' to 'frost-free' to 'barely heated') and half a dozen cold frames for propagation, there is no room for sentimentality or heartbreak over a particular plant.



ROD & JANE LEEDS' ADVICE ON BULBS AND ALPINES

■ **Buy British** whenever possible. Plants and bulbs grown locally to you, or at least in this country, are more likely to be suited to local growing conditions. So many small nurseries have gone out of business, we need to support them.

■ A good general **growing mix** for alpine in pots, sinks and troughs is John Innes number 2 or 3 mixed 50-50 with coarse grit. That gives good drainage but supplies enough nutrients.

■ For alpine in troughs, **place stones vertically**, half-buried

in the soil. That way the plants can send their roots down the side of the stones to keep cool. Tufa is the best medium for growing alpine in a natural setting.

■ **Explore** every aspect that your garden has to offer. Hot, sunny south-facing spots can be used for sun-loving bulbs such as alliums or nerines, while ferns and *Clematis* (which prefer cool roots), can be planted on the north side of a low wall.

■ **Don't be afraid** to try something described as 'difficult' to grow. Try it, and move it around if it doesn't work.

For example, they spend many hours twin-scaling snowdrops and *Narcissus* – an exact science which involves slicing the bulb into segments to encourage new bulbils to form at the base – hopefully to go on to form more plants. However, as Jane says, “you do everything right and you follow the rules. But sometimes you lose plants. The interest is trying to find out why something hasn't worked and to try again next year.”

Trees and shrubs in this garden often take second billing to the main stars, the bulbs and perennials, but they are an important feature nevertheless and include several cultivars of flowering *Ribes* and *Prunus*. But there is still a puzzle that needs solving. Where are the chestnuts at Chestnuts? “There weren't any here when we arrived,” laughs Rod, “but we couldn't not put in at least one.” Naturally,



Top left Shrubs such as *Spiraea* and *Staphylea colchica* add structure in a mixed border.

Middle Vibrant flowers of perennial *Lathyrus vernus* partner well with grape hyacinths.

Right Mounds of snowy white blossom on the arching stems of *Spiraea thunbergii*.



it is not an ordinary horse chestnut or even a sweet chestnut. It is the multi-stemmed *Aesculus parviflora* – perfectly chosen to stay within bounds and not to steal the show from what is going on all around. ■

Chestnuts, Whelp Street, Preston-St-Mary, Sudbury, Suffolk CO10 9NL. Open by appointment. The next bulb sale for the Mid Anglia Group of the Alpine Garden Society will be on Sunday 21 August, 2-4pm at Pentlow Mill, Cavendish, Suffolk CO10 7SP.



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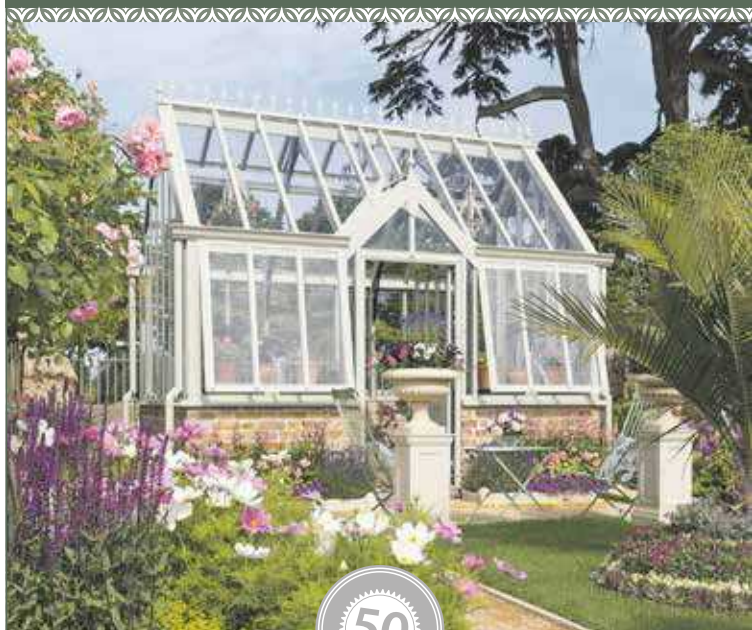
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FITTING THE PRESENT

Horkesley Hall in Essex may be grand, but it is the setting for an informal family garden that suits its owner's relaxed approach to gardening

WORDS **BARBARA SEGALL** PHOTOGRAPHS **MARCUS HARPUR**

ROUNDING THE DRIVE TO HORKESLEY HALL, you could be forgiven for thinking that you are dressed for the wrong century and indeed in the wrong sort of carriage. The 1820s Grade II* listed property, set in eight acres of woodland, complete with giant Doric portico and traditional stables (with ponies), is straight out of the pages of a Jane Austen novel.

The allusions to an earlier time are soon swept aside. House and garden, although visually grand, are the setting for a lively family life. Polly and Johnny Eddis took over the house and garden in Essex from Johnny's parents in 2002. Since he bought the house in 1989, Richard Eddis, a great tree planter, added his collections of *Malus*, *Prunus*, *Acer* and *Eucalyptus* to a setting that already held large park trees including an *Acacia* bursting out of its metal bands, London planes, oaks and what is thought to be the largest ginkgo outside RBG Kew, all from earlier plantings.

"The trees and the lakes are among the big 'wow' features here, in all seasons. They speak for themselves, but we can enhance them with new plants and new plantings, such as the *Gaura lindheimeri* seedlings that now offer a delicate and dancing butterfly effect on the south bank of the Upper Lake," says Polly.

"We might have remade the garden but we relish the overlays from the immediate and more distant past. Instead we have altered and re-organised parts of the garden to reflect our family interests and activities.

"You can make a garden yours by adapting and adding to what is already there... essentially this is a family garden, where our children play, celebrate and look after their ponies."

Goal posts and pony jumps in various corners of the garden confirm this sense of the garden as a place where children can make up great stories and run riot. Polly's daughters, Lucy and Susie, and their younger brother, Algy, enjoy successive birthday celebrations in

Swathes of fragrant *Narcissus* 'Pheasant's Eye' bring the turf below cherries and other mature trees to life.



‘the birthday house’ – a small summerhouse built into the outside corner of the swimming pool wall. Here birthday and other cakes appear out of nowhere.

Lucy and Susie are skilled equestrians and much of the property is used for pasture. Indeed, during their early years Polly kept the garden ticking over gently, but always planned for the longer term when she would have more time to spend on it.

A garden visit usually moves through the stable block, towards the kitchen garden, a delightful shed the height of a child, and the *Pyrus* ‘Chanticleer’ avenue, then past the *Acer* collection and the south-facing, wall-backed border before sweeping past the house towards the lakes and stream. Finally, take in the circular tulip and dahlia bed and collection of box balls to the east of the house.

In spring the garden bursts into colour. First come snowdrops and aconites, once in small clumps but now making large swathes as they drift near the two lakes and the stream on the south side of the house, or under the mature trees. Near the drive and one of the entrances to the garden is a lime, underplanted with *Narcissus* ‘Winston Churchill’. “The combined scent is so wonderful, like a Jo Malone cocktail,” says Polly.

Top Sweeping lawns lead from the house to the Upper Lake.

Right Tulipa ‘Ballerina’ and bergenias add a pretty splash of spring colour.





POLLY'S ADVICE

■ If in doubt, phone a friend.

I do this regularly, meeting up with and taking advice from my garden consultant and friend, Cherry Sandford (www.cherry-designs.co.uk). Cherry sees the garden with a more detached eye and offers ideas and feedback. Whoever you ring needs to be on the same wave-length and to have a good eye.

■ Treasure self-sown seedlings and plant them up. They will be the least expensive and most rewarding means of bulking up your plants.

■ Enjoy the garden more and worry less. The garden used to keep me awake at night, but now I find pleasure in what there is and what I can do to enhance it.

■ Cherry's advice is to think ahead for next season, next year. We take photographs, write notes and work out what is missing from the picture in terms of colour, fragrance, form and texture. Through the images you can see how to perfect it.

■ April is the month for splitting, moving and replanting to get the garden to a desirable point for summer. It is surprising how established it can look in just a month or two. It also helps to keep costs down.



Scillas snake their ways through various parts of the garden and the willows that weep into the Upper Lake start to shoot with their spiky green foliage. The Lake is set for a spectacular year, having been dredged in 2015. The silt trap from the stream that feeds the two lakes was also cleaned, giving this area a good fresh start.

The south side of the house is dignified and formal; a view across mown stripes of the lawn is softened by collections of spring-flowering *Malus* and *Prunus*, as well as a young specimen of *Amelanchier x grandiflora* 'Ballerina'. A cedar that lost its head in the great storm of 1987 is a favourite haunt for woodpeckers, and is a

Top Cherry blossom contrasts with the cedar that lost its head in the storm of 1987.

Middle The vegetable garden is sited alongside the unheated lean-to glasshouse.

Bottom The branches of *Amelanchier* are clothed in fresh white blossom.



HORKESLEY HALL NOTEBOOK

Constant renewal keeps this garden fresh



BOX SPHERES

This double border in a raised bed with box balls of varying sizes gives pleasure in the garden and from the kitchen window. Like many features in the garden, this collection, given to Polly for a birthday present, marries formality with a relaxed natural style. The round box plants are underplanted with the frothy daisy, *Erigeron karvinskianus*.



PEAR AVENUE

The 'Chanticleer' pear avenue makes a good display all through the year, but as with many of the plantings made in recent years, Polly has had to make harsh decisions and take out several trees. "In this case, the roots travelled down to the tennis court, breaking up its surface. It is awful felling a tree but they had been planted too densely," she says.



BENCH IN A NICHE

Soon after opening the garden for the first time in 2003, much of the statuary was stolen and this plinth was all that was left of a particularly lovely piece. It has become an ad hoc table for the Lutyens-style bench. *Osmanthus delavayi* provides the scent in spring and Polly is considering planting more of it to bulk up the hedge.



STREAM BRIDGE

Between the bridge and the stream is the silt trap that, along with the Upper Lake, was drained and cleaned in 2015. Camellias add glossy formality to the bridge itself, in contrast to the swathes of snowdrops, cow parsley and bluebells that thrive on the banks in spring and early summer. Later in the year, hydrangeas fill the space.

much-loved feature here among the spring blossom.

The east side of the garden, backed by a tidily kept hedge of the conifer x *Cuprocyparis leylandii*, holds a celebratory birthday garden of box balls of varying sizes. Their shapely formality is kicked into touch by a frothy underplanting of *Erigeron karvinskianus*, which cascades and trails in and around the box plants. *Ceratostigma plumbaginoides* also provides a softening effect with blue flowers in spring.

In a circular bed, dahlias are the high-summer sizzle, while in spring *Tulipa* 'Black Hero', forget-me-nots, drumstick alliums and *Euphorbia oblongata* provide the colour. Heydays have come and gone for many of these perennial favourites, but Polly is happy with them. "We didn't want a makeover, we wanted the garden to look lived in and fat, old-fashioned flowers make it seem as if we have been here forever."

Under and alongside the *Acer* collection are perennial wallflowers and *Narcissus* 'Thalia'. In autumn the acers provide their own fireworks in foliage colour, competing with the buttery yellow of the ginkgo near the house.

"As some of my father-in-law's *Acer* collection matures, you can see they were planted too closely, so we will keep an eye on them and may have to remove some to give the others more space," says Polly. "He always said that he knew they and other collections were planted too closely... but he said that would be our problem to solve."

In winter, the avenue of *Pyrus* 'Chanticleer' stands out starkly against snow on the ground, but when spring arrives, it is as if the snow lies on the branches, thickly clad as the dark stems are with small white flowers. "Looking up through these bare branches on a sunny day in winter or through the flowers in spring, they seem to frame and blue up the sky even more," says Polly.

The framework of trees throughout the garden, new and old, provides seasonal interest with bark, foliage and flower buds, and later, in autumn, with wonderful leaf colour. This forms the backdrop for the formal elements of the garden, as well as for some of the more relaxed features, such as the drifts of cow parsley, that Polly welcomes as part of her natural approach.

Although the overarching garden ethos is relaxed, Polly tries to add to, alter or insert features annually to increase the garden's appeal to visitors. In these endeavours she has two great collaborators: Cherry Sandford, her garden consultant and friend, offers ideas and advice, and helps with plant supply and implementation, while estate manager Glenn Deering is the man who mows, provides wooden structures, digs, divides and prunes, and brings the ideas to fruition.

This year many new features are planned. Polly, Cherry and Glenn have regular 'breakfast board meetings' at a local gastro pub, where they decide which ideas will make the cut. To celebrate the 90th birthday of Queen Elizabeth II in June, a border once known as the Birds & Bees Garden is to become a Royal Garden. Some 200 'Carnaval de Nice' tulips, 'Ice Folly' daffodils,



Top The lakes promise to sparkle this summer.

Middle Self-sown euphorbias spill over the steps to the house.

Bottom *Tulipa* 'White Triumphator' and *Narcissus* 'Thalia' highlight deeper floral tones.

alliums by the score, pink roses and *Philadelphus* will bulk up spring colour and scent in the border, while lengths of bunting strung in the hedging behind will add to the jollity of the moment.

The south-facing border at the base of the walled garden (home to the swimming pool), is also due for changes. "It always looks wonderful around Chelsea, but later it can look messy. The plan is to give it more structure, height and form," explains Polly.

Metal obelisks are the key to this and they will hold early-flowering clematis, such as 'Early Sensation' and *Clematis x cartmanii* 'Joe' as well as later-flowering clematis from the Viticella and Texensis Groups.

Polly is also planning to add her own collection of magnolias to the garden, and she hopes to increase her collection of hydrangeas, which line the stream.

Horkesley Hall, Little Horkesley, Colchester, Essex CO6 4DB opens for the NGS on Thursday 9 June (10.30am-4pm), admission £6, children free. Visitors by arrangement from March to October.

For a donation to the NGS, visitors can also bring a trailer behind their car for Horkesley Hall's compost – fully rotted crumbly horse manure mixed with Hempcore – or it can be bagged up. Chisholm's is a self-contained two bedroom cottage at Horkesley Hall, a perfect place for a gardener on holiday, visit www.airbnb.co.uk for information. ■



SWEET RETREAT

Subtle spring hues and wildflowers create an informal atmosphere in the garden at Laurence Sterne's former North Yorkshire home

WORDS **CAROLINE BECK** PHOTOGRAPHS **ANDREA JONES**

IF IT IS TRUE THAT FORMALITY IS GIVING WAY TO INFORMALITY in gardening style, then look no further than Shandy Hall in the village of Coxwold, North Yorkshire. The medieval, topsy-turvy house was once the 'sweet retreat' of the Anglo-Irish vicar and literary sorcerer Laurence Sterne who wrote *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* in the 1760s, and even if you haven't read the mischievous book, you may have seen the film, *A Cock and Bull Story*, featuring Steve Coogan and Stephen Fry.

Like many country vicars, Sterne was a fond gardener, writing to a friend in 1760: 'if you honour me with a letter, it will find me either pruning or digging or trenching or weeding or hacking up old roots or wheeling away rubbish'. Beware: his garden is not for lovers of symmetry and straight lines, but if you like a garden to have its head, then Shandy Hall is a place to lie down on the grass beneath the apple blossom and soak it all up – and no-one would bat an eyelid if you did.

The house was bought by the Laurence Sterne Trust in 1967 in a poor state of repair. The garden, similarly derelict, was established and developed by Julia Monkman, wife of the Trust's founder, Kenneth Monkman, and both came to live here in 1970. It incorporates parts that Sterne might have known, such as the box-edged parterre at the front of the house. It is currently managed by the curator, Patrick Wildgust, and his partner, Chris Pearson, who

calls herself the garden's referee, tending the two acres with no budget but with the help of loyal volunteers.

The garden's informality doesn't arise from not having an army of gardeners, however. It comes from a wit that Sterne himself would have enjoyed. Shandy is a local dialect word for 'odd or crack-brained', a spirit that pervades the wild shaggy-dog story of the book, and the garden, too, if you know how to read it.

Chris, a librarian by training and a voracious reader, has playfully incorporated key elements of *Tristram Shandy* into the planting and style of the garden and finding them is great fun. Look out for plants with marbled foliage such as nasturtium 'Jewel of Africa', *Pulmonaria officinalis*, *Epimedium x versicolor* 'Sulphureum' and *Arum italicum*, a reference to Sterne's bafflingly infamous marbled pages – 'the motley emblem of my work'. There are plants with dark flowers, too, such as hellebores, fritillaries, 'Queen of Night' tulips and *Geranium phaeum* 'Mourning Widow', which refer to Sterne's Black Page, an entirely inky blank page that marks the death of Parson Yorick.

The digressive style of the book is echoed in the unstructured route around the garden.

Actually there is no set route; visitors are encouraged to simply wander as they will. Even the grass is mowed

It is a place to lie down on the grass and soak it all up – no-one would bat an eyelid if you did

Opposite, clockwise from top left Apple blossom and coral coloured tulips in spring; fresh new growth in relaxed, informal borders.



in concentric circles by Patrick at high speed, occasionally to the outrage of some visitors, mainly male, who like their lawns in stripes.

A blacksmith local to the area, Chris Topp, has made a fine swirling handrail based on a drawing by Sterne. The work represents an airy flourish from a walking stick of one of his characters, Colonel Trim, as he expresses his thoughts about man's freedom. In the Wild Garden, which was once an old quarry, this playful meandering includes corkscrew hazel, contorted willow and mown paths snaking through native trees, wildflowers and tall grasses that lead eventually to another eccentric delight, The Moth Shed.

Moths are key to understanding Shandy Hall, not least because their ephemeral nature resonates with Sterne's writing on the fleeting nature of life and death, which he understood better than most because of his fragile health. He suffered from tuberculosis and as the local vicar was the man that hatched, matched and dispatched his village

Above The garden has been gently restored by a team of volunteers over the past 30 years. **Right** Venerable old fruit trees have been left in place, and now stand watch above spring forget-me-nots.





Left Wildflowers add to the informal feel; here, red campion with a meandering mown path.

Below Pink tulips offer small splashes of bright colour.

Bottom left An old espaliered pear tree blossoms against a stone wall.



PLANTS AT SHANDY HALL

Spring colours and wildflowers proliferate in this gently tended garden



SYRINGA VULGARIS

Lilacs make large shrubs but are hard to beat for their beautiful once-yearly display of scented, nectar-rich flowers.



***PRUNUS AVIUM* 'PLENA'**

Double white flowers cover this variety of our native wild cherry with clouds of blossom in spring.



PULMONARIA OFFICINALIS

Bearing leaves mottled with silver splashes and blue and pink blooms, lungwort is ideal for shady places.



***EPIMEDIUM X VERSICOLOR* 'SULPHUREUM'**

Pale lemon flowers on wiry stems appear with red-flushed new leaves.



SMYRNIUM PERFOLIATUM

Don't mistakenly dig up the parsley-like seedlings; they will produce their zingy flowers in their second or third year.



SILENE DIOICA

Grow red campion from seed sown in spring or autumn, or introduce plug plants to an existing meadow.



LAMIUM MACULATUM

The leaves of dead nettle are adorned with a silver stripe. It is a perfect fuss-free ground cover for a shady border.



GALIUM ODORATUM

Sweet woodruff forms pretty mats of fine green foliage that are topped with white, scented flowers during spring.



BERGENIA CORDIFOLIA

A tough, leathery leaved spring perennial with upright spikes of magenta-pink flowers.



parishioners. One summer evening, Patrick noticed the strange vertical mating dances of ghost moths and wondered how many other moths might visit the garden, which has led to a careful documenting of over 370 species of these secretive nocturnal insects. A full list of these moths can be found at their blog, www.shandyhallmoths.blogspot.co.uk.

The Moth Shed is deep in the Wild Garden, and is where Patrick releases captured moths, many of which, like muslin footman, coxcomb prominent and small blood-vein, sound as if they've emerged straight from Sterne's wild imagination. The specially commissioned stone step for the shed by the artist Peter Coates, who worked with the late Ian Hamilton Finlay at his Scottish garden Little Sparta, appears to be floating above the ground and bears the words 'Constantly to light'. This line from *Tristram Shandy* also refers to the way moths are attracted to light, and the fact that new species

Above Lichen-coated trunks hint at the age of the garden's trees, while loosely mown grass and benches bring a gentle, relaxed air to the space.

GARDENING FOR WILDLIFE

■ **Don't be too tidy** Leave stems of perennials in place over winter as their hollow stems provide refuge for many beneficial hibernating insects such as ladybirds and some species of bee.

■ **Plant as many wildflowers** as possible because they are an excellent source of nectar for bees. Try to plant flowers with single rather than double blooms, too. They might look less dramatic, but are easier for bees and other insects to feed from.

■ **Not all weeds are merely weeds.** Many of our so-called weeds, such as nettles, garlic mustard, rosebay willowherb and brambles provide valuable food for native butterflies, moths and other insects. If you can, leave a little wildness in your garden.

■ **Plants with night-time fragrance** such as evening primrose, night-scented stock, jasmine tobacco (*Nicotiana glauca*) and honeysuckle are magnets for moths.

■ **If something is using your plants** as a larva, be philosophical. It might in turn be dinner for another creature, increasing the biodiversity of the garden. Mullein moths, for example, can reduce a verbascum to tatters overnight, but a higher population of moths means more bats.

■ **Put in a pond**, no matter how small. It is one of the most dramatic things you can do to attract wildlife quickly to a garden. Within a few weeks, insects, birds, amphibians and small mammals will all be visiting the pond.

For more information on wildlife gardening go to www.wildaboutgardens.org.uk



are constantly appearing in the garden. Such is the enthusiasm for moths at Shandy Hall that it opens especially at dusk for the National Gardens Scheme, so visitors may see the insects up close.

Chris, always keen to encourage wildlife to the garden, has built up a considerable knowledge of the foodstuff of moths and has added plants such as sweet rocket (*Hesperis matronalis*), honesty (*Lunaria annua*), night-scented stock and cuckoo flower (*Cardamine pratensis*). She is always on the lookout for additional plants that will ensure their survival, alongside the four species of bat that have been recorded in the garden – pipistrelle, daubenton, whiskered and long-eared.

The garden, and its dusky wildlife, is increasingly a place for artists and writers to create their own work. The old granary overlooking the Barn Garden is now a gallery for exhibiting work inspired by Sterne's writing, and below it is a cottage for visiting artists (complete with a swarm of bees that has taken up residence in the old walls, making the house hum with energy, especially in the evening). These artists feed off the unique creative atmosphere of the place which, like Sterne's own work, is endlessly variable and open to chance, making you feel that anything could happen in this abundant place.

Shandy Hall, Coxwold, Yorkshire YO61 4AD. Open especially for the NGS on 6 May and 1 July, in the evenings from 6.30-8pm. The garden is also open daily (except Saturdays) from 1 May until 30 September. Tel: 01347 868465 or visit www.laurencesternetrust.org.uk



Left Chris Pearson, a former librarian, has included literary references throughout the garden.

Below Blossom blurs the boundary between garden and countryside beyond.



GARDENS TO VISIT NEARBY

North Yorkshire is rich in horticultural heritage to enjoy during a visit



FOUNTAINS ABBEY AND STUDLEY ROYAL WATER GARDEN

The grounds of this 18th-century water garden hidden in the Skell Valley also contain the romantic ruins of a magnificent medieval abbey. Ripon, North Yorkshire HG4 3DY. Tel: 01765 608888; www.nationaltrust.org.uk



YORKSHIRE LAVENDER GARDEN

This specialist nursery also has a series of lavender-themed gardens with spectacular views over the Howardian Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The Yorkshire Lavender Farm, Terrington, York YO60 6PB. Tel: 01653 648008; www.yorkshirelavender.com



SCAMPSTON WALLED GARDEN

An 18th-century walled garden with contemporary design and planting by Dutch plantsman Piet Oudolf that sees a mixture of late flowering perennials and grasses. Scampston Hall, North Yorkshire YO17 8NG. Tel: 01944 759111; visit www.scampston.co.uk ■



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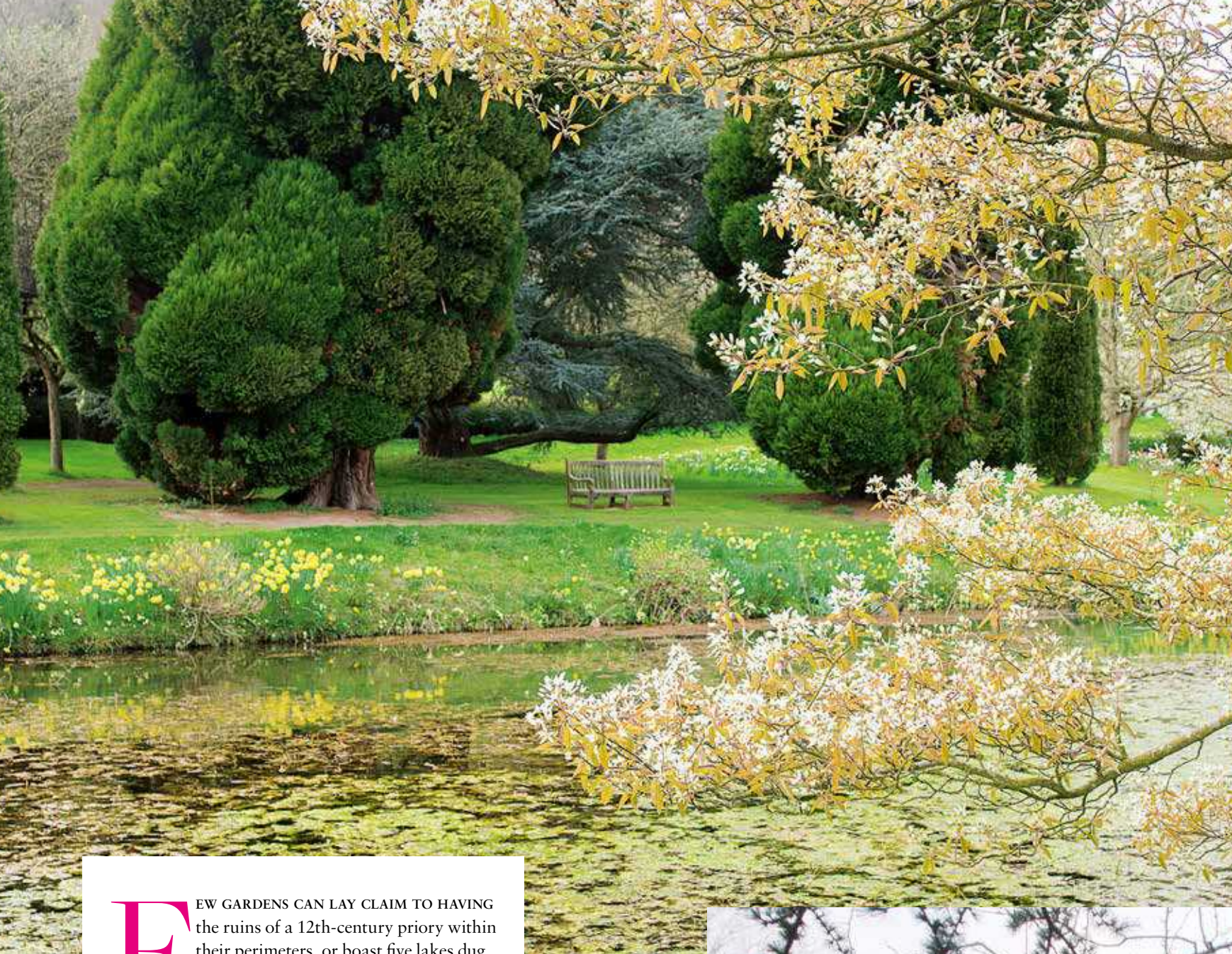
Andrew Crace, 32 Bourne Lane, Much Hadham, Hertfordshire SG10 6ER, UK. Tel 01279 842685 www.andrewcrace.com

The church and house, built around the original prior's hall, is set among 10 acres of garden.

PRIOR ARRANGEMENT

Benedictine monks were the first to tend the expansive garden at Little Malvern Court. Seven hundred years on, the tradition is retained to impressive effect

WORDS **GREG LOADES** PHOTOGRAPHS **IAN THWAITES**



FEW GARDENS CAN LAY CLAIM TO HAVING the ruins of a 12th-century priory within their perimeters, or boast five lakes dug by the hands of Benedictine monks.

Yet despite having this rich history, the gardens at Little Malvern Court, Worcestershire, are far from a relic of the past, in fact many features of the garden are a mere 33 years old.

Little Malvern Court has been home of the Berington family by descent for nearly 500 years. The current owner, Alexandra Berington, took over the garden from her mother and father-in-law in the early 1980s, and the 10-acre garden was given a major transformation by Arabella Lennox-Boyd and Michael Balston. Close to the house, an air of intimacy and formality was created, using yews, box and pleached limes to break up the areas into distinct garden rooms.

The formal style spreads out to the wider expanses of lawns and lakes, with statuesque yew sculptures, in keeping with a 110-year-old 200-metre long topiary yew hedge, which runs along the boundary to the west of the garden. The lakes were created by the monks at the priory and used as fish ponds. Their layout in the garden today is closely based on the layout from a plan dated 1720.

Above *Amelanchier* is planted on the banks of the lakes, where it looks splendid in spring.

Right The long yew hedge towards the west of the garden is over 100 years old.





Above Tulip displays are changed each year for maximum vigour and vibrancy.

Below Dainty forget-me-nots add extra colour beneath tulip blooms.



Another reminder of the history of the garden is a giant lime tree that has stood at Little Malvern Court for 250 years. Although falling victim to storm damage during the last 10 years, it lives on in the garden where once it measured 300 feet in circumference. It is said a young Queen Victoria played underneath it when she visited the garden as a child in 1831.

The areas close to the house are the preserve of a rich mixture of ornamentals. Large terracotta pots are planted in spring with mixed varieties of tulips chosen by the owner, to be followed by frothy summer plantings with old-fashioned roses throughout to create delicate displays in a carefully restrained palette of colours.

All the spring and summer containers are planted as pairs to create a sense of balance and symmetry. Pink *Tulipa* 'Angélique' and purple violas create one of the most fulsome container displays in the courtyard, with the violas delivering an early burst of colour at the end of winter before the exquisite double pink blooms of the tulips announce that spring has truly arrived.

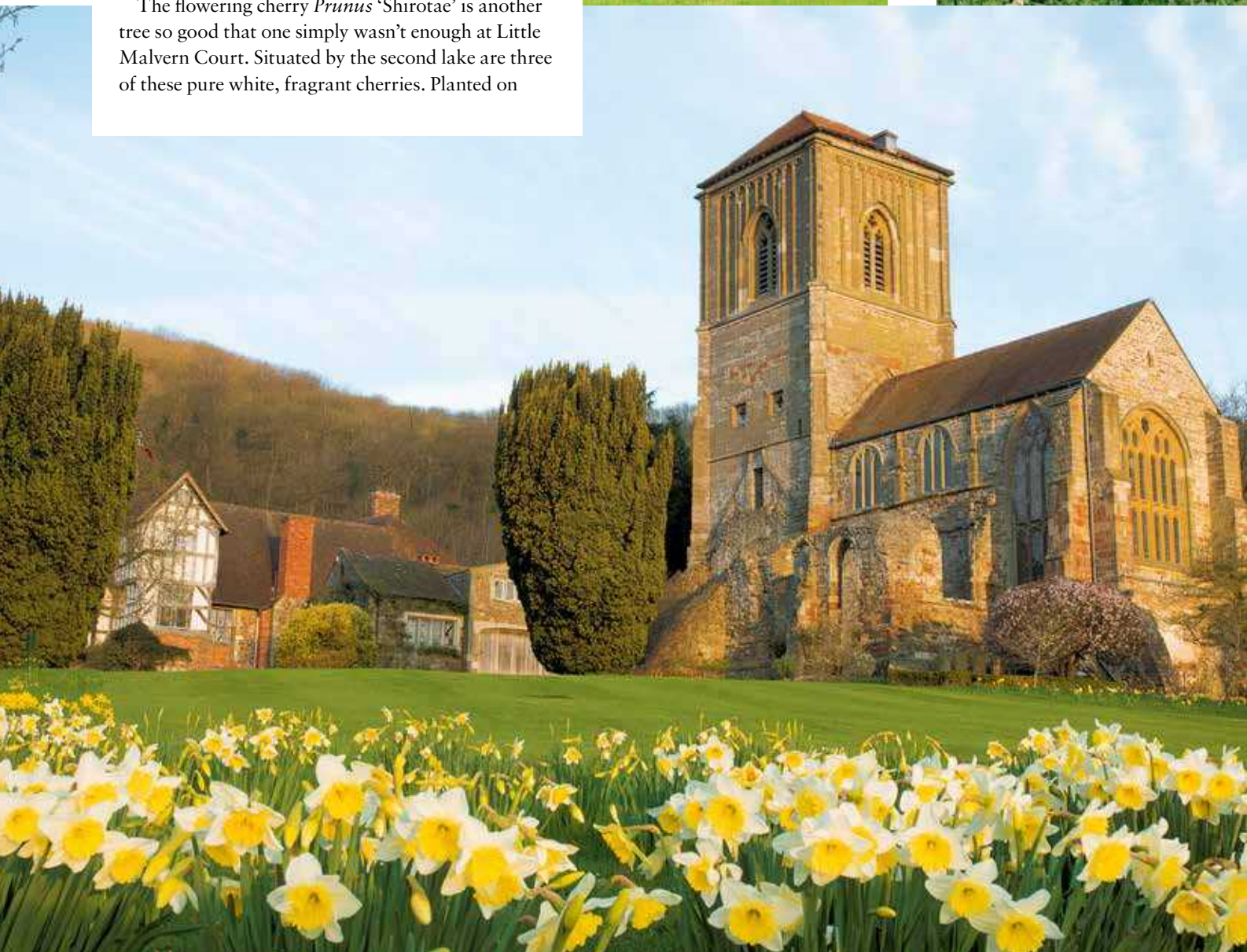
The tulips, which are ultimately removed to make way for summer displays that include scented pelargoniums, are not risked in the main garden the following year in case vigour is poor. But rather than going to waste, head gardener, Hugh Thomas, replants them away from the garden to use as cut flowers for the house the following spring.

Symmetry and repeat planting are key elements running through the garden, stretching towards the lakes and lawns. Two pairs of potted standard Portuguese laurels (*Prunus lusitanica*) frame the entrance to the Rose Garden, which contains beauties such as the seductive, deep-purple gallica rose 'Tuscany Superb' and deliciously scented hot pink 'Louise Odier'. From here the eye is led through the formal garden rooms out into the lawns and lake. Five *Magnolia soulangeana* 'Alba Superba' grace the lawn heading towards the summer house. "They create masses of billowing clouds of white, which look all the more impressive because the trees flower before they come into leaf," says Hugh.

The flowering cherry *Prunus* 'Shirotae' is another tree so good that one simply wasn't enough at Little Malvern Court. Situated by the second lake are three of these pure white, fragrant cherries. Planted on

Below The thatched summerhouse, built by David Raffle.

Bottom Exquisite daffodils make a fine footnote to the ruins of the priory.





Top *Prunus* 'Shirotae' and ethereal *Narcissus* 'Silver Chimes'.

Above Yews are cut in September to keep lines sharp.

a bank that falls away towards the water, it creates a low, spreading canopy that hangs tantalisingly close to the surface of the water to create a dreamy spring snapshot that is as beautiful as it is fleeting.

A semi-circle of *Prunus* 'Shirotae' near the spring that feeds the top lake creates another truly wondrous tree canopy, mirrored from below by a sea of the pure white daffodil *Narcissus* 'Silver Chimes'. This area below the cherries was re-landscaped to rejuvenate the stream garden and to create a suitable environment for planting the daffodils that add so much to this fresh floral scene. While 'Silver Chimes' is a recent addition to the garden, many of the

LITTLE MALVERN COURT NOTEBOOK

Clever planting ideas from the garden



WHITE BED

To the west of the house is the rose garden, enclosed by a sturdy backdrop of yew hedges. A central bed is filled with 'Iceberg' roses to create a cool display of white flowers. This follows on from tulip 'White Triumph', which is planted among the roses to pull off the same trick, adding sharp white blooms.



TULIP TWOSOME

The blousy tulip 'Angélique' is paired with purple violas to make a stately spring container display that covers the foliage of the tulips, allowing magnificent double flowers to be shown off to perfection. New displays are created each year to keep the courtyard displays fresh and vibrant.



SIMPLE SYMMETRY

All pots are planted in pairs, reinforcing the formal, focussed feel of the planting in the garden by the house. On the lower terrace, tulip 'West Point' one of the best bright yellow tulips, adds spring exuberance to this area. Symmetry is enforced in repeated containers and underplanting, which enhances the mirrored feel.



SPRING GLORY

Magnolias compete with cherries for the grandest display of spring finery. Five *Magnolia soulangeana* 'Alba Superba' add a stately splendour to the lawns near the lakes and show that the design trick of repeat planting is not only for herbaceous borders but is one that works on a larger scale, too.



GOOD ADVICE FROM HUGH THOMAS, HEAD GARDENER

■ **Box plants** are cut once a year, ideally before the end of May. This allows them to make vigorous re-growth during the remainder of the growing season. It also reduces their susceptibility to blight. Use sharp cutting tools and cut on a dry day. Collect and remove all prunings and allow good air circulation around the plants. Feed after pruning.

■ **Daffodils.** After flowering has finished, nip off spent flowers and allow the foliage to die down naturally to help the bulbs build up their reserves for flowering in the following year. Sprinkle fish, blood and bone fertiliser around the base of the plants.

■ If in doubt, **never prune a cherry.** The trees never regrow well after being pruned. The only exception is diseased or damaged branches, which should be pruned out in summer.

daffodils in the garden are over 30 years old, and are maintained by a regime of feeding and deadheading.

One of the reasons for Little Malvern Court's spectacular haul of spring blossom is that the garden tends to miss frost, so that blooms are at their abundant and unspoilt best. "We don't get a lot of frost because the garden sits on the east side of the Malverns and the cold air gets blown straight across the garden and out of it. Cold air doesn't sit in the garden at all," says Hugh.

The local soil is very unflatteringly known as 'mudstone' and Hugh doesn't have a good word to say about it. "It's essentially heavy clay soil with stones in it," he says. "It is very stony and very difficult to work." The more intensively planted areas around the house have been supplemented with imported topsoil and plenty of bulky organic matter to ease cultivation. "The soil near the house belies what's underneath," explains Hugh.

The soil is obviously the perfect host for the magnolias, but there are anomalies. While there are other magnolias as well as rhododendrons dotted about the garden, there are other parts of the garden where these acid lovers will not grow at all. Happily this is a garden that can manage without them. ■

Little Malvern Court, Little Malvern, Worcestershire, WR14 4JN. Tel: 01684 892988 or visit www.littlemalverncourt.org.uk for more information about opening times.



Top Cherries are underplanted with snowdrops, followed by daffodils.

Middle Deep yellow *Tulipa* 'West Point'.

Bottom The avenue of pleached limes, planted in 1983.





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Second Helpings

A compact city garden is injected with a fresh dose of sophistication following a basement extension

WORDS **VERONICA PEERLESS**
PHOTOGRAPHS **CLIVE NICHOLS**

Barbara and Johannes Sulzberger have asked Stephen Woodhams to design their garden in Chelsea not once but twice. They first commissioned him to design their garden in 1999, and lived happily with the result for 15 years. Then, in 2014, they made plans to extend the house into the basement, which meant the garden would have to be dug up. They asked Stephen to design their 'second' garden, too. "If you get asked back, you know you must be doing something right," laughs Stephen.

The garden had stood the test of time well but Stephen admits: "It looked like it had been designed 15 years before." Barbara didn't want to make huge changes, but explains: "We wanted to keep the feel of it but to make it look more modern. Stephen said, 'Let's update it', so that's what we did."

The new 3m x 6m garden, facing north-west, has a similar footprint to the old one, with a large entertainment area and raised beds around the edge, but has been updated for the 21st century. "The water feature dated the garden a bit," says Stephen. "It was a water wall that I originally designed for [the hairdresser] Charles Worthington." It has been replaced by an eye-catching new Cotswold stone sculpture by Tom Stogdon, whose work featured at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show in 2015.

The dining area previously housed a table that seated six to eight people but this has now been replaced with a large sofa and a low table. “The garden is now more for hanging out in, and eating on your lap,” explains Stephen. “The girls [aged 11 and 14] are growing up, so the garden is now more for chilling out than dining.” Barbara loves the new, sociable feel: “People sit on the sofa and on the table, and we bring out extra chairs. Visitors also sit on the walls, and we put cushions on the steps down to the kitchen, too. We can fit a surprising number of people into the space.”

The hard landscaping has also had an upgrade and is now a mix of stone and decking. “As we’re always barefoot in summer, it is nice to have wood underfoot – it is like a rug,” says Barbara. The lighting, too, is much improved. “It is fancier, as

Right Two tree ferns filter sunlight coming into the basement light well.

Below The green wall extends from the basement to the upper level. A toughened glass plate is fixed midway for shelter and security.

Opposite A zinc water feature brings interest to the light well at basement level.



FACT FILE

■ **Designer** Stephen Woodhams Studio 9, 33 Stannary Street, London SE11 4AA. Tel: 020 7735 3798; www.stephenwoodhams.com

■ **Builder** Morgan Oates, Morgan Oates, 6 Edensor Road, London, W4 2RG. Tel: 020 8987 9470; www.morganoates.com

■ **Garden furniture** is the Network collection by Roda. View designs at the European Design Centre, 77 Margaret Street, London W1W 8RS. Tel: 020 7323 3233; www.rodaonline.com

■ **Paving** by London Stone. Contact directly for local stockists. Tel: 08442 251915 or 01753 212950; www.londonstone.co.uk

■ **Sculpture** by Tom Stogdon, an associate of the Royal Society of British Sculptors, based in Oxford. Tel: 07798 625 647; www.tomstogdon.com

■ **Pots and water feature** Pots supplied by Stephen’s company and are available in three colours, including cream, shown here; the water feature was also supplied by Stephen.

■ **Irrigation** The garden is kept watered by a semi-automatic irrigation system. Find a similar one at Gardena.





the technology has advanced so much in the past 15 years,” says Stephen.

The other prominent new feature is the green wall, which extends from the glass-covered lightwell in the basement up to the upper level. “As soon as I saw the design of the house, I knew I wanted to connect the levels with planting,” says Stephen. Planted with heucheras, ferns and other shade-loving evergreens, it is a striking feature, although some plants in the lower reaches of the basement have struggled in the low light. “We may have to add a few artificial ones – they look so good these days,” confides Stephen.

The lightwell now houses two tree ferns and a zinc water feature. “It is a fun space and it allows air and light to the rooms,” says Stephen. “It is wonderful to have the sound of water,” adds Barbara.

Much of the planting from the old garden has remained, as the original plants Stephen put in place thrived. Barbara was keen to keep a cloud-pruned holly in the right-hand corner – the only plant that was left in situ during the build. It is now complemented by a cloud-pruned olive tree. Much of the planting is evergreen. “In London, it is so nice to look out on greenery when we’re surrounded by grey,” she says.

“Stephen is wonderful to work with – he has a vision, and you know his vision makes sense,” she concludes. “I’m always happy looking at the garden – it looks warm and inviting, even in winter. It feels like it has given us more living space.”

PLANT PROFILE

Selected foliage provides a pleasing foil for the architectural lines of the garden



Brachyglottis 'Sunshine'

Soft and sensuous foliage is held on ghostly white stems that makes this summer-flowering shrub sleek and stylish in a modern garden. Its flowers are much brasher: bright yellow and daisy-like.



Heuchera 'Marmalade'

The beauty of heucheras lies in the many colour changes their foliage goes through during the year. Amber, bronze, peach and green shades may all be in evidence but always in soft and subtle shades.



***Polystichum setiferum* Divisilobum Group**

This graceful fern adorns the living walls, adding a lush and verdant green among brown, red and russet hues.



Phyllostachys nigra

Up to 4m tall, this bamboo makes an elegant screen, blurring garden boundaries and adding a slender leaf canopy to the landscape.

Design Details

Green wall

The green wall was grown off-site by Stephen's company and is mains fed, which means it doesn't have a large tank. The framework and pump are concealed by batons of western red cedar. Some of the plants have struggled in the lower light levels at the base, and Stephen is not ruling out the possibility of replacing some with fake plants.

Planting

Stephen chose a selection of plants, including evergreen box, olives, prostrate rosemary and scented *Trachelospermum jasminoides*, that he knew would do well in the space. "In London gardens, you need a high proportion of evergreens, as they look good all year round. The climbers give a different feel in summer when they flower."

Sculpture

The sculpture is by renowned sculptor Tom Stogdon and was commissioned for the garden. "I often work with Tom on site-specific pieces. The Cotswold stone gives a natural, organic feel and I like the colour," says Stephen.



Sofa and table

The sofa and low table are both part of the Network range by Roda. "The sofa is 3m long, it fits comfortably into the garden." The cushions are hydro draining so can be left outside all year round. "There are 300 fabrics to choose from, including chenilles and velvets – the technology has advanced so much recently," says Stephen. "I've done fully upholstered velvet chairs for one client. It also means you can co-ordinate interior and exterior design by using the same fabrics."

Paving

The paving is Moleanos limestone from London Stone and it has been used to clad the raised beds. "I didn't want to use too many materials in the garden," explains Stephen. "As the stone is chunky, it makes a statement but it is also soft, thanks to its light colour."

Decking

Stephen likes to set ipe (used in this garden) or iroko decking into stone paving. "They're hardwoods, with a nice smooth finish. I like the idea of a sofa sitting on a wood 'rug'. It is an idea we use often."

Lighting

The lighting was designed by Stephen and later installed by the architect. The sculpture and two cloud-pruned trees at either side of the garden are enhanced by uplighters. Uplighters in the paving silhouette the pots and there are strip lights attached to the underneath of the sofa, which give the area a soft and romantic feel.

Bamboos

The bamboos at the front of the house were part of the original design that Stephen planted in 1999. As part of the garden's upgrade, the leaves were removed from the base of the stems to show them off, and to permit more light to enter the rooms in the basement. They are underplanted with hebes, euphorbia and hellebores. ■

Clockwise from top

The Roda furniture has hydro draining cushions that stay out year round; planters of ferns, brunnera, rosemary and lavender; Tom Stogdon's spiral sculpture.



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A Guide to Greenhouses

The finest greenhouses combine beauty with function; taking advice on choosing, siting and using these garden features will bring out their best

WORDS **CLARE FOGGETT**





There are two schools of thought when it comes to incorporating a greenhouse into a garden: tuck it away out of sight, or turn the new greenhouse into a striking feature.

Your approach will probably depend on the space and sites available, and the model of greenhouse you choose – a traditional, decorative greenhouse, possibly bespoke, will always lend itself to being shown off more than a purely functional one.

The site needs to be level for straightforward installation, as well as sunny and open. Overhanging trees or nearby hedges will block the sun, and falling branches in winter storms could spell disaster. This is quite apart from the task of clearing fallen leaves from the greenhouse gutters. Orientation is also important: making sure the ridge of the greenhouse runs from east to west will ensure it receives the maximum possible light year round.

The obvious position for a new greenhouse is nearest the parts of the garden most reliant on the





Above Grape vines provide useful shade in summer – and a delicious crop.

Opposite, from top Give a decorative greenhouse pride of place; brick or slabbed paths are easy to maintain.

allow. The most common regret among gardeners is a greenhouse that is too small to accommodate a growing collection of permanent plants alongside its seasonal inhabitants. Be sure, however, to leave at least 60cm clear around the structure for ease of access and maintenance. If space is needed for benches along both long sides, the greenhouse will need to be at least 2.4m wide; with a bench on one side only, 1.8m is just right.

Where a free-standing greenhouse isn't possible, or space is tight, consider placing a lean-to against a boundary or house wall. This space-saving option can be an ideal and surprisingly capacious solution.

The next decision is its material, in the main a choice between wooden frames or aluminium. Aluminium is much cheaper, and can be powder-coated in different colours. Its thin, light nature lets

plants and crops raised inside it – a kitchen garden for example, or cut-flower patch, where its presence will add to the design of the garden.

Once the site is settled, work out what size greenhouse will fit the space available. Always select the largest model that budget and space will

Elegant Enhancements

These simple spring projects will add a timeless, sophisticated note to an existing greenhouse

GROW A PEACH TREE

Warmth-loving peaches and nectarines will benefit from the protected shelter of a greenhouse, and make a pretty wall-trained tree, their branches trained into a fan or espalier. Their uplifting spring blossom is beautiful in shades of pale sugar pink and they'll bear a deliciously juicy crop, made all the more satisfying if it was helped along by hand pollination – use an artist's paintbrush to simply dab pollen from one flower to the next, in the absence of bees. Try peach 'Duke of York', which has the RHS Award of Garden Merit or nectarine 'Lord Napier'.



PLANT A GRAPEVINE

A stalwart of traditional glasshouses, grapevines are a brilliant greenhouse plant, with a delicious harvest, too. Older specimens, trained along the eave, look super when well pruned, their main stem and fruit-bearing laterals in an orderly herringbone formation against the roof. In summer, the vine's large leaves will cast welcome shade, helping to

regulate the temperature inside. Ideally, and traditionally, vines should be planted with their roots outside the greenhouse, the stems trained inside through a gap at ground level. Where this isn't possible, they can be planted inside, too, but will need regular watering. Try 'Black Hamburg' or 'Schiava Grossa'.



POT A PAIR OF STANDARDS

Enhance the decorative appeal of the greenhouse with a pair of potted standards either side of the entrance. Bay trees, holly, olives and fuchsias all work well. Patient gardeners might grow a standard from scratch. Choose year-old plants with straight stems and nip out all side shoots until the main stem reaches the desired height. Then leave the side shoots at the top to develop into a head, pinching back to promote bushy growth.



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Clockwise from top left The Hidcote is perfect for smaller gardens; Mottisfont has room for benching all around; A spacious projected central lobby distinguishes The Tatton; Fit a bench and beds in The Scotney; the range has a classical Victorian look.

When deciding on your greenhouse project, there are a lot of factors to consider: What colour should you choose? Where will it be positioned in your garden? And where will everything go? But the most important thing to decide on is how big you want your greenhouse to be.

Alitex designs and manufactures the finest aluminium greenhouses for year round use, with a classical Victorian look. Alitex has a long-standing relationship with the National Trust and has created an exclusive collection in a wide range of sizes, each one catering to a variety of horticultural needs.

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internal layout options. 2.9m x 5.1m £19,500*

The Wimpole Over a metre longer than the Tatton giving you even more growing space. 2.9m x 6.4m £23,750*

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maximum light through to the inside. Wooden-framed greenhouses are appealing on the eye and are better able to store heat, but do need regular maintenance to keep the timber in good repair over the years. A brick base is very attractive but limits available light at ground level for sunlight-hungry crops such as tomatoes. One part-glazed side is perfect to set a bench against though, and will also help insulation and heat retention.

The glazing itself also needs to be chosen. Thin horticultural glass lets through the most light, but it is easily broken and shatters into shards; toughened glass is a better, safer option, particularly in a family garden. The alternative to glass, polycarbonate, won't break and retains heat well, but doesn't let in as much light.

Lastly, remember the additional features that are essential for regulating interior temperature: louvre vents in the greenhouse wall (normally opposite the door) and windows in the roof. These are critical to year-round air circulation and lowering the temperature on hot, sunny days. Automatic openers that respond to the temperature inside remove the need to remember to open the windows yourself.

Inside, think about the base. Slabs are practical, easy to sweep and keep clean and place staging or benches on, but a soil border along one side offers more flexibility in terms of growing. Crops from plants such as tomatoes will be better for their roots being able to roam freely rather than constrained

Above A paved area directly outside the greenhouse is handy for easy access and hardening off plants.

Above right Vents and opening windows are vital to regulating the temperature inside.

Right Benches along one side will elevate plants and show off seasonal blooms.

in a pot or grow-bag. Bear in mind, though, that year-after-year repeat cropping from the same family of plants can lead to a build-up of soil-borne pests and diseases, so the soil in the border may need to be replaced at intervals.

Another benefit of installing a brand new greenhouse is the chance also to supply services to it, such as electricity – much more disruptive to try to add retrospectively. A power supply is invaluable for serious growing, as it makes soil-warming benches or mains-powered propagators a possibility. Lighting removes limit on the time that can be spent inside pricking out and potting on. Electric heaters can be plugged in during winter to widen the range of



tender plants that can be grown and over-wintered inside. Seek an electrician qualified under 'Part P' building regulations to install any mains electricity outdoors (search www.napit.org.uk to find a local registered electrician). They will use armoured cable or enclose it in a duct and bury it at least 50cm below the ground, with water and weather-proof sockets and a residual current device (RCD) at the source.

A water supply close at hand is also time and effort saving. Consider installing a water butt to feed off the greenhouse gutters and capture rainwater for quick, easy irrigation.

Outside and most importantly, work out how to design the garden immediately around the greenhouse to help it fit into its surroundings and make the most of it as a feature. Most greenhouses are symmetrical, so lend themselves to formal planting around them, matching their symmetry – a parterre for example, or twin flower beds flanking either side of the door.

A 'standing out' area can prove to be invaluable in a greenhouse. This is halfway house for plants being hardened off before going into their permanent positions. If there is room for a cold frame or two, even better, perhaps built onto one side of the greenhouse. Make sure when you put in beds and borders around the greenhouse that there is a path straight to the door, at least wide enough to accommodate a wheelbarrow. You'll be glad of a direct route when taking heavy bags of compost or trays full of plants in and out. ■

Above left An electricity supply is very useful.

Above right Make sure light isn't blocked by large trees or hedges.

Right Furnish the exterior of the greenhouse with attractive pots.

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Small and Mighty

Hardy spring-flowering alpine plants are the jewels of the garden

Small but beautiful, alpine plants delight the eye with their vast range of form and colour. The majority have mountainous origins being hardy and mostly perennial, and are extremely adaptable to gardens in Britain. These plants also suit smaller gardens, and a trough or container filled with alpines and decorated with choice stone can be a focal point on a terrace or in a courtyard, especially in spring, when many of the best-known species flower.

Good garden centres offer a fine selection of easy-to-grow alpine plants but, for a more exciting range, specialist nurseries need to be sought. Wherever they come from, alpines offer the gardener months of pleasure, combining well with other small plants, especially dwarf bulbs which may be flowering at this time of year.

PULSATILLA VULGARIS
Pasqueflowers are exquisite, with finely divided foliage and beautiful chalices in pink, purple, red or white, each petal backed by a mass of silvery hairs. After the flowers fade, the fruit heads, rounded and silken, are carried atop the stem high above the foliage. These are fine plants for sunny positions at the front of a border or a rock garden, but they should not be disturbed once established. Look for the gorgeous 'Budapest Blue' with sumptuous lilac-blue flowers.



2 **ERINUS ALPINUS**

Commonly called fairy foxglove, this European alpine is easy and adaptable, revelling in dry sunny places. It is excellent on the rock garden and in troughs, and has become naturalised on old walls and bridges in some parts of the country. Plants form lax, dark green rosettes of toothed leaves. The rosy purple flowers are small but plentiful. Various forms are available including a white variant 'Albus', 'Abbotswood Pink' with mid- and pale-pink flowers, carmine-coloured 'Dr Hanale' and 'Mrs Charles Boyle', which is a pleasing soft pink.



3 **ARABIS CAUCASICA**

Arabis is one of the true harbingers of spring among alpins. Plants make low humped mats of softly hairy grey-green leaves. Clusters of white flowers appear in March and April and attract early butterflies. It is an easy plant for free-draining soils and banks in sun or part shade, where the mats may reach 60cm across. Cultivated forms include 'Flore Pleno' with long-lasting double white flowers, 'Variegata' with yellow margined leaves and pink-flowered 'Rosea' and 'Rosabella'.

4 **HABERLEA RHODOPENSIS**

Haberlea belongs to the same family as the African violet (*Saintpaulia*) and *Streptocarpus* but, unlike them, it is hardy. It is an evergreen perennial composed of tight, semi-fleshy rosettes of oblong, pointed leaves. In early summer racemes of small, flared, tubular flowers appear coloured lilac to violet-blue with a yellow throat. This is a fine alpine for shady wall crevices or sandwiched between gaps in a rock garden or trough where it will thrive. 'Virginalis' is pure white.





6 AURINIA SAXATILIS
Known for many years as *Alyssum saxatile*, or yellow alyssum, this cheerful subshrub, 20-30cm tall, sports silver-grey leaves and airy clusters of bright yellow flowers in spring and summer. An easy, adaptable plant for dry sunny places and wall crevices, it is utterly dependable and will self-seed. It is a central European and Balkan plant, hence its love of sun and warmth, but is perfectly hardy in most of Britain. Also worth seeking out are dwarf 'Compactum', double-flowered 'Plenum', and delightful biscuit-yellow 'Dudley Neville'.

IMAGES ALAMY

5 GENTIANA ACAULIS

Gentians are one of the most beautiful and tantalising of all alpine plants. A denizen of the Alps and Pyrenees, plants form hummocks of blue-green leaves and in spring sport large trumpets of intense deep blue that are spotted with green within. Once established, it bears long-flowers and repays the gardener with a sumptuous display. Its chief requirements are alkaline, free-draining soil that does not dry out, and ample sunshine. Excellent in raised beds and troughs.

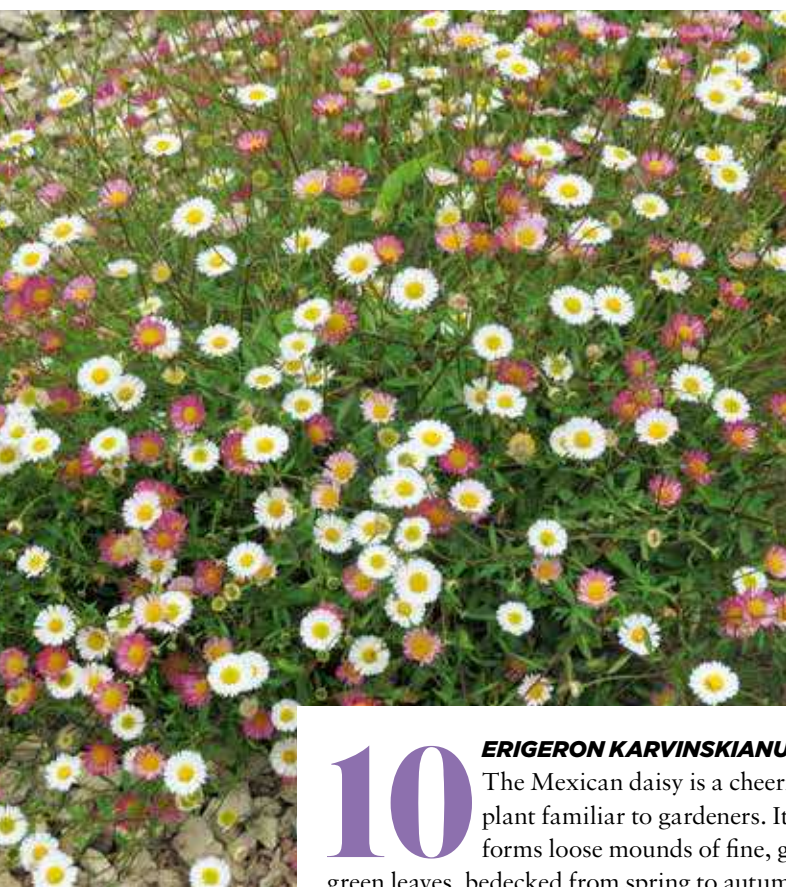


7 TEUCRIUM ACKERMANNII

The germanders, in the same family as the thymes and salvias, have a few highly worthy alpine plants for the garden. One is *T. ackermannii* from the mountains of Anatolia, Turkey – a great choice for a warm sunny corner in a good gritty soil. The plant is essentially a subshrub forming a low spreading mound up to 70cm across eventually, the narrow grey-green foliage contrasting with numerous flattish heads of reddish purple flowers borne throughout the summer months and on into autumn. Few plants attract more bees into the alpine garden.



8 **CAMPANULA PORTENSCHLAGIANA**
 Summer is the time for bellflowers and there are some good alpine from which to choose. This one, with its tongue-twisting name, is one of the finest and one of the most readily obtainable. In the wild, it is a plant of limestone cliffs in the western Balkans, and in gardens it revels in crevices in paving or wall. Plants form spreading colonies of bright green foliage. In summer and autumn, branched clusters of typical bellflowers appear; an eye-catching lilac-blue, each flower is about 2cm long. It can be invasive but is nonetheless delightful.



10 **ERIGERON KARVINSKIANUS**
 The Mexican daisy is a cheerful plant familiar to gardeners. It forms loose mounds of fine, grey-green leaves, bedecked from spring to autumn with small white daisy heads that turn pink and are delightfully reversed in purple. In the wild, in Mexico, it inhabits rocky places, while in cultivation any sunny, well-drained site will suffice. It is especially effective at the base of walls, in gravel and on raised beds.

9 **GLOBULARIA CORDIFOLIA**
 There aren't many truly dwarf shrubs for the alpine grower but *G. cordifolia* fits the bill perfectly. It is evergreen, adorned with small glossy leaves often notched at the tip. In summer, it bears numerous powder-puff blue flowers on slender stalks above its ground-hugging mat. The plant is a denizen of hot sunny rocks in the mountains of southern Europe and western Turkey. In gardens, raised beds or troughs of gritty free-draining compost and plenty of sun are its chief requirements, as well as time to settle in.





Jacksons Fencing Garden structures and shelters

How to create a stylish hideaway in your garden

Early spring is the perfect time to start planning a garden makeover. It's exciting thinking about what changes you can make to your outside space. Something to keep in mind is making sure you move fast, so you can complete your project in plenty of time to fully enjoy the summer.

One of the things that can make a huge difference to the time you spend in the garden is to create a structure or shelter. This not only adds an interesting visual element, but obviously has a use as a handy outdoor room.

TV programmes like George Clarke's 'Amazing Spaces' and 'Shed of the Year' have broadened our minds to the potential of existing structures like chalets, caravans, sheds and even shepherd huts, that can be 'up-cycled' to make a quirky haven in the garden, where we can relax, entertain friends and family, or spend time on our own hobbies and pastimes.

However, not everyone has the time, money or imagination to conceive of renovating a shed that's already in situ, or making something from scratch. Perhaps this is where the smart choice is investing in a ready-made structure like the Retreat or the fantastic new Curve from Jacksons Fencing.

The Curve is a sleek and simple structure - one continuous curve arching gracefully from the ground. There's no need for posts, with this seemingly gravity-defying contemporary garden shelter. It's fastened securely to the ground with three strong steel blades that are dug in on each side.

The generous interior space is big enough to set up a dining area, leaving ample room for a chill out zone. This is enhanced by the unusual effects produced by sunlight shining through the horizontal slats, which creates a calming setting for relaxing in.

The clear polycarbonate sheets covering the panels, lend the Curve a shower-proof quality, and this also adds some protection from the wind.

If you are looking for something a little smaller the Retreat is available in two styles; one with the original Venetian-style infill panels, the same as Jacksons very popular panels of the same name and the other version has the new woven infill panels, which gives it a very different look (shown below).

As with all their products, Jacksons garden shelters are hand made in Kent from Jakkured timber guaranteed for 25 years, so you can enjoy them for many years to come. To find out more, visit www.jacksons-fencing.co.uk/lifestyle or email louise@jacksons-fencing.co.uk



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Red Sensation

Blood-red flowers and elegant foliage caught the eye of 18th-century explorers making their way through north-west America

A welcome sight when blooming in spring, and loved by Victorian gardeners, *Ribes sanguineum*, the flowering currant, was collected by Archibald Menzies, in 1792, on an expedition to survey the west coast of North America, with Captain George Vancouver from 1791-95. Menzies, whose task was to survey the local flora, 'found it at various points along the coast and collected herbarium specimens'. It was later found by Lewis and Clark on 27 March 1806, and they, too, pressed specimens, which languished in storage until discovered by Fredrick Pursh (1774-1820), when compiling his *Flora Americae Septentrionalis*, in 1814. He named it *Ribes sanguineum* (*Ribes* from the Arabic or Persian name *ribas* or acid tasting; *sanguineum* for bloody) noting below his Latin description of the plant 'Flowers beautiful, of a blood red or purple'.

It was first cultivated in Britain when seeds were set back to The Horticultural Society of London (now The Royal Horticultural Society) by the great Scottish plant collector David Douglas (1799-1834). He found it in spring, within a month of arriving on his second expedition to North America in 1825. He recorded it was 'most common at point George near the confluence of the river Colombia... it usually grows on rocky situations or on the shingly shores of streams in partially shaded place...never extending beyond the influence of the sea breeze'.

The seeds he collected arrived in Britain in October 1826, germinated easily and the young shrubs, which were planted in open borders, flowered aged barely two years old. Its robust nature and reliability of flowering gained it many friends. David Douglas himself unashamedly trumpeted its glories in his *Account of some new, and little known Species of the Genus Ribes* (1829): 'Whether we consider the delicate tints of its blossoms which appear

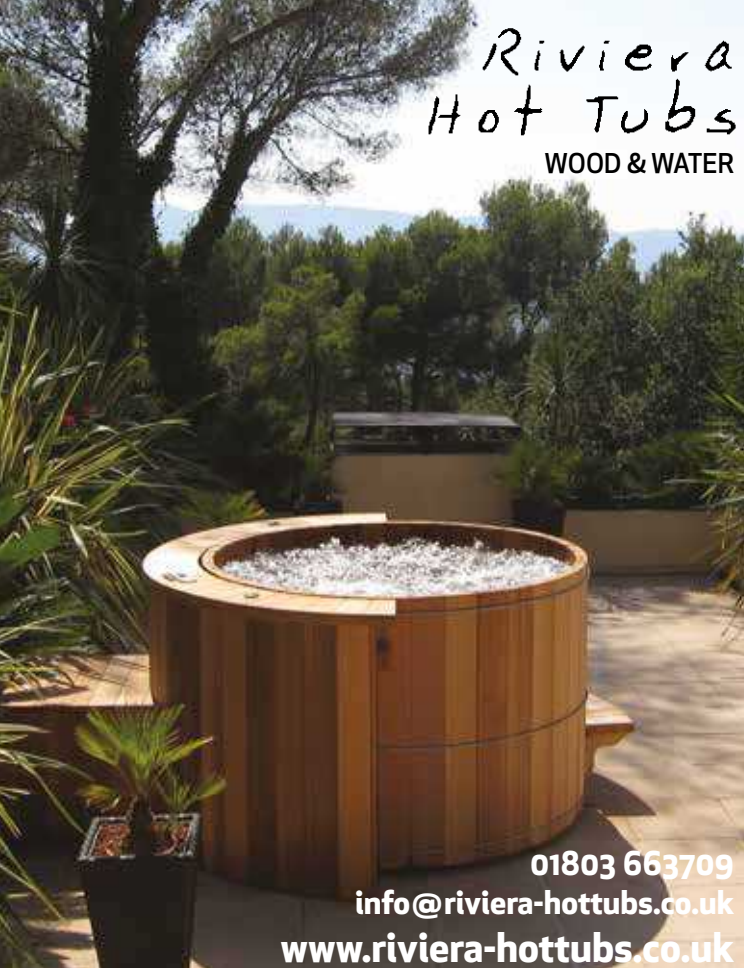


Hardy, reliable and attractive: *Ribes sanguineum* is a popular garden shrub.

'This currant is the finest of *Ribes* and in the very front rank of all spring-flowering shrubs.'


in March and April, (eminent garden writer JC Loudon noted a longer flowering season, from mid-March to mid-May) the elegance of its foliage, the facility with which it is increased and cultivated, or its capacity of enduring the severest of our winters without the least protection, it may be regarded as one of the finest and most interesting additions that have been made in our shrubberies for many years'. Writer

William J Bean, concurred: 'This currant is the finest of *Ribes* and in the very front rank of all spring-flowering shrubs, being one of those that never fail to blossom well'. Little wonder that The Horticultural Society considered that the discovery of this plant alone justified the £400 invested in the three-year expedition, or that the flowering currant and its many cultivars are still greatly appreciated today. ■



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A delicate haze of peach envelopes *Acer* 'Brilliantissimum' when it bursts its buds in spring.

Shades of Spring

Bedazzled by spring flowers at every turn? *Geoff Stebbings* offers a reminder that the fresh foliage of trees and shrubs can be colourful, too



If a single shrub epitomises the spring glory of foliage it must be *Pieris*, that Asian, lime-hating shrub seen at its beautiful best in large public gardens where rhododendrons and camellias vie for attention. New cultivars are introduced every year but 'Forest Flame' is still hard to beat if you have room for a large shrub – it reaches 3m in height. New growth is bright salmon-scarlet but it needs careful placement because full sun is required to get the best colour, while late spring frosts or strong winds can damage young leaves.

Pieris japonica 'Flaming Silver' is a good alternative where space is limited because it has dramatic spring foliage edged with white when mature, making it a good all rounder. Of course, *Pieris* has pretty flowers, too, usually white but increasingly, in new cultivars, in shades of pink and carmine.

In the absence of acid soil, grow *Pieris* in large pots of acid compost, ensuring it never dries out. If plants become straggly

they can be pruned hard, from April to June, and will soon sprout new growth.

Content to grow almost anywhere, *Photinia* 'Red Robin' could be considered a 'poor man's pieris' but with its dark green mature leaves and vibrant red young growth, it is in no way inferior. If there is a problem with this variety, it seems that poorer quality plants may not colour so well. It is also prone to becoming straggly, unless pruned regularly. 'Red Robin' makes an excellent hedge, but if space is in short supply, 'Little Red Robin', which grows only to 1m high, is much more manageable.

Maybe familiarity breeds contempt but, although I count 'Red Robin' among my favourite 20 shrubs, I am a greater fan of *Prunus laurocerasus* 'Etna'. This is a special form of laurel that has beautiful orange new shoots. It is more subtle but is none the worse for being so.

Another plant that finds its way into most gardens, either at the beginning or at the end of the owner's career is *Spiraea* 'Goldflame', that tough small

Above left The new growth of *Pieris* 'Flaming Silver' contrasts with its variegated foliage.

Above right Orange-tinged *Spiraea* 'Goldflame'.

Right Flushed scarlet: *Photinia* 'Red Robin'





shrub with orange spring foliage and deep pink flowers in summer. Capable of enduring almost any soil (though suffering from mildew if it is too dry in summer), it looks brightest when in full sun and when pruned back to about 15cm high in spring. Growth after pruning is especially vigorous and bright but it means there will be no flowers the summer after pruning. This is no great loss – unless you are a bee.

A subtle contrast to this is *Hypericum androsaemum* 'Albury Purple'. New growth on this shrub is purple with small yellow flowers that fit in nicely. Foliage fades to green with age. *Hypericum* can suffer from rust, which disfigures the leaves. If it strikes, simply trim it back to be rewarded with new purple leaves.

The sacred bamboo (*Nandina domestica*) is a dream of a shrub, with elegantly divided evergreen foliage, small but pretty white flowers and, with some luck, scarlet berries. It has an upright habit and rarely reaches more than 1.5m tall. New foliage is rich burgundy in colour. Thriving in sun or part shade provided it is not too dry, it is perfect for borders or pots.

Above *Hypericum* 'Albury Purple' has pretty foliage tinged with purple.

Right Colourful young growth cascades from *Nandina domestica*.





There really isn't a catch with this shrub, unless you buy the dwarf 'Fire Power' which, though colourful, has none of the charm of the species or indeed most of its other cultivars.

Popular Japanese maples are worth their place in the garden all year round for a multitude of reasons, but *Acer palmatum* 'Orange Dream' is in vogue at the moment for its new foliage in tangerine shades and shoots that age to a pleasing pale green.

The matter of how these colourful young leaves mature is a bit of an issue with *Acer pseudoplatanus* 'Brilliantissimum', a kind of sycamore with shrimp-pink young leaves. Although it is spectacular in spring, things go rapidly downhill in summer when, instead of turning to rich green, the leaves have a rather unhealthy, pale look. The same could be said of *Sorbaria sorbifolia* 'Sem', which mirrors the colour scheme and changes in almost exactly the same way but somehow, perhaps because of its delicate, feathery leaves and easy-going, often suckering habit, it seems in much better taste.

Aesculus x neglecta 'Erythroblastos' is another

Above left *Toona sinensis* 'Flamingo' is bright pink as it bursts its buds.

Above right Young colourful growth of *Acer palmatum* 'Orange Dream'.

Right Vivid new shoots on *Sorbaria sorbifolia* 'Sem'.



WHY ARE SOME YOUNG LEAVES COLOURFUL?

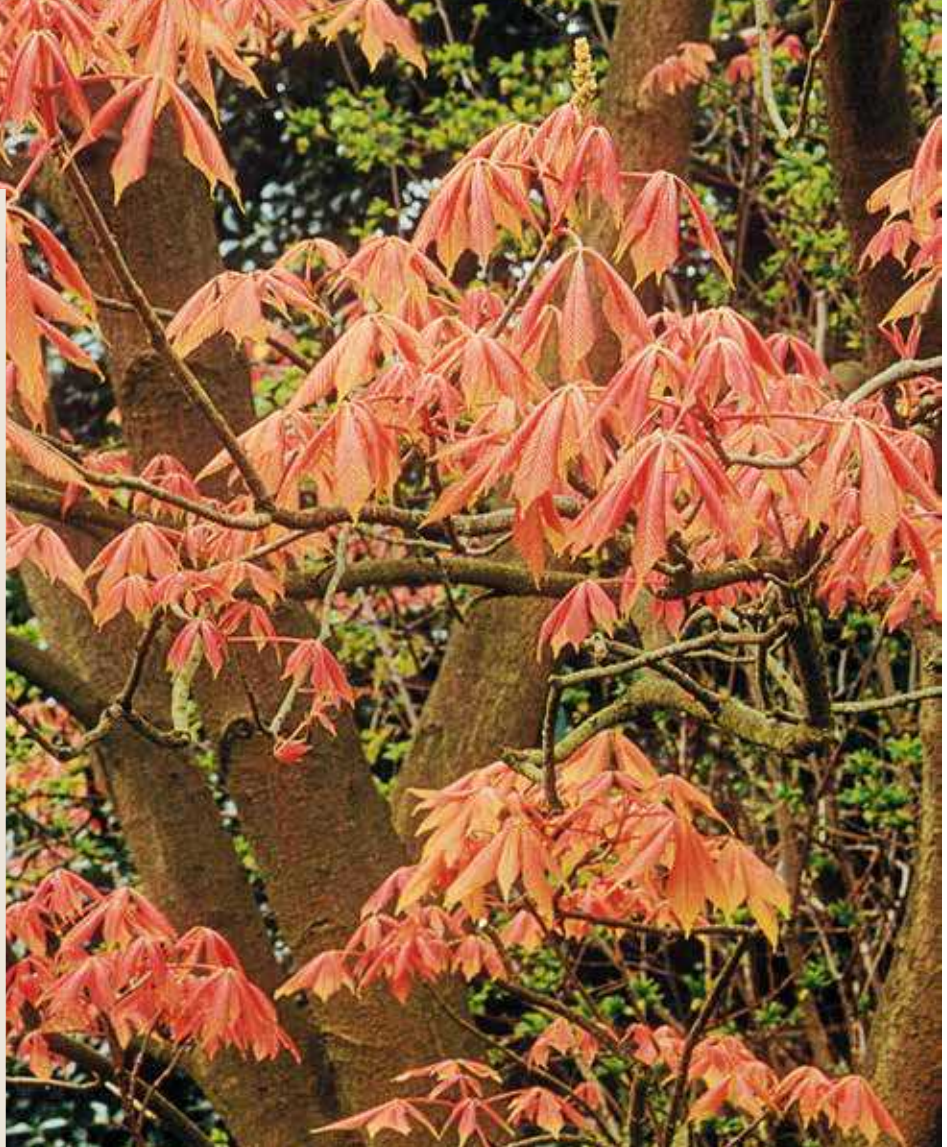
What is the reason for this fiery display of colour on some plants' new shoots? Not all plants have this habit but it is much more common in tropical climates. The red and purple colouration is caused by anthocyanins – the same chemicals that are so good in our diet – and there are various theories to explain why some plants produce them.

Although it was once thought anthocyanins had antifungal properties, protecting the soft, precious leaves, the most convincing explanation is that the colouring helps stop the foliage from being eaten by insects. There is an obvious logic to this: red and purple young leaves resemble autumn leaves that are tough and poor in nutrients. Red colouration also masks the green beneath, so insects may not even see the leaves as food. The fact that the leaves change to green as they age and grow tough and less palatable reinforces this theory.

Of course, plants didn't knowingly develop this early colouring, but the fact that it has developed in so many botanically unrelated plants suggests that it is successful. Gardeners have clouded the issue a little by selecting forms that have yellow or purple leaves throughout the season and propagating plants with especially spectacular spring foliage. What grows in our gardens is based on nature, but is enhanced by gardeners.



New growth on *Pieris*.



oddity, a form of horse chestnut with coral pink shoots on a small tree, which needs a spot out of cold winds to be at its spectacular best. *Toona sinensis* 'Flamingo' is not simply coral but bright pink. In its homeland, this Chinese tree is grown more for the food value of its new leaves than its beauty, but that does this beautiful tree a disservice.

The same shade of true pink is also a feature of the willow, *Salix integra* 'Hakuro-nishiki', although in this case it is diluted by profuse white speckling on the leaves. Although always colourful and appealing in the garden centre, this is a plant that does not really improve with age but, with regular pruning, it can be kept attractive.

Mention should be made of a group of plants that excel in all respects, not least for young growth: roses. Many have new leaves with hints of red or purple, and on some this is a real feature. 'Lady Emma Hamilton' is an English rose with rounded, apricot-orange, scented blooms while 'Freddie Mercury' is a Hybrid Tea with more traditional, satsuma-coloured flowers and impressive purple shoots. *Rosa x odorata* 'Mutabilis' is a good all-rounder that does best in a warm, sheltered place. Its single, only faintly fragrant flowers open yellow and age through peach to carmine and they open all summer, mixed among its purple new leaves.



Top Unusual horse chestnut *Aesculus* 'Erythroblastos'.

Above The rose 'Lady Emma Hamilton' is renowned for its plum-coloured young foliage, a lovely contrast with its apricot blooms.



HERBACEOUS PLANTS

Colourful spring foliage is less common among herbaceous plants but peonies are spectacular exceptions to the rule. Whether herbaceous types, tree peonies or the superb 'Itoh' hybrids such as 'Bartzella', expect some early colour from the new leaves of these long-lived plants. Underplant them with primroses and pulmonaria for flowers that contrast with their bright red colouring.

Lamprocapnos spectabilis (or bleeding heart, formerly named *Dicentra*) is also flushed with the beetroot shading when young and the new shoots of *Lysimachia punctata* are red as they push through the soil, most obviously in the variegated cultivar 'Alexander' where the lack of green colouring reveals the red as bright pink.

The confusingly named autumn fern (*Dryopteris erythrosora*) produces pleasing amber fronds throughout spring and summer, adding interest to this evergreen fern. It is commonly available and easy to please when grown in shade or semi-shade but it is worth looking out for the cultivars 'Brilliance' or 'Radiance' which have been chosen for their bright fronds. Either would add charm to a shady area where colours other than green are wanting in summer. ■

Above left The shoots of *Lysimachia* 'Alexander' are bright pink as they emerge.

Above right New maroon growth of a herbaceous peony pushes through blue forget-me-nots.



EXTENDING THE DISPLAY

If one display of colour is simply not enough, you can encourage a second flush of growth on most shrubs by pruning them in early summer. Most hardy shrubs will not produce new growth if pruned after late July so give your *Photinia*, *Spiraea* or *Nandina* a trim in June or July. This will result in a mass of new growth and these shoots will have time to ripen by winter so they are not damaged by cold. This pruning may reduce flowering slightly in some plants.

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From above The Eden Blockley has a range of features including trip-free access, high eaves for better air circulation and increased space for plants and people.

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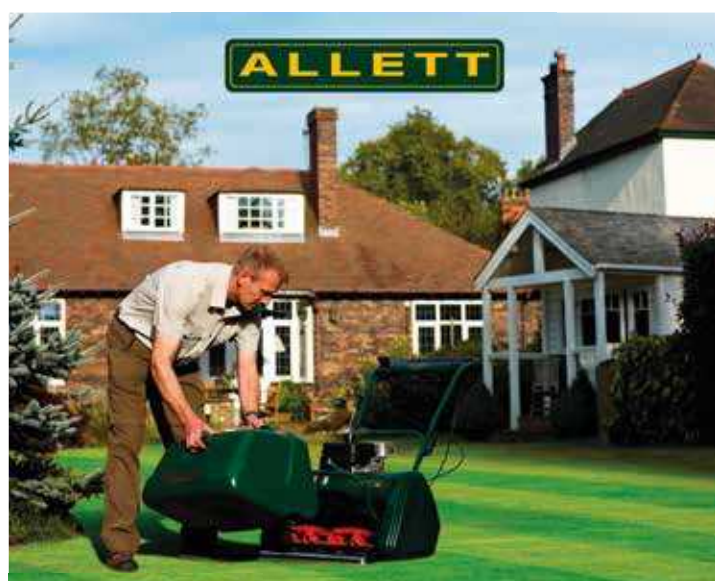
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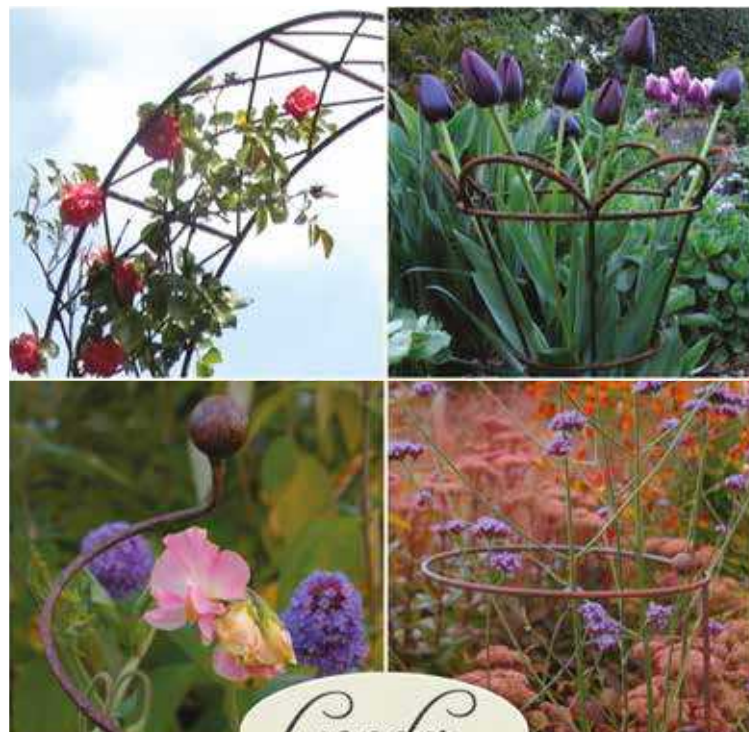
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Richard Hobbs holds the National Collection of Muscari, with over 160 different types of these colourful, eye-catching bulbs in his care



'GULL'

This is a fascinating form discovered in Turkey and is one of the best so-called pinks. It is more white in colour than pink but the great thing about this grape hyacinth is that it shows gradations of colour as the flowers age. The buds are white, tinged with pink, but after a few days the flowers change to a pretty rose-pink towards the base of the flower. As the flowers go over, they show a deeper magenta shade. This is a short variety, reaching 10-12cm in height.



'GOLDEN FRAGRANCE'

A mixture of shades of yellow and brown make this an unusual variety. The fertile flowers are golden yellow and the sterile flowers are tinged a bronze-brown. As well as unusual colour it also has an unusual scent, with the flowers smelling similar to bananas. This is the only variety of *Muscari* that can truly be called a 'yellow'. Native to Greece, it is rare in the wild and multiplies very slowly, so it is a good choice to grow in the garden if the rampant nature of many of the grape hyacinths is not desired. 'Golden Fragrance' performs best in a warm, open, sunny site in soil that drains very well and grows to 20cm.

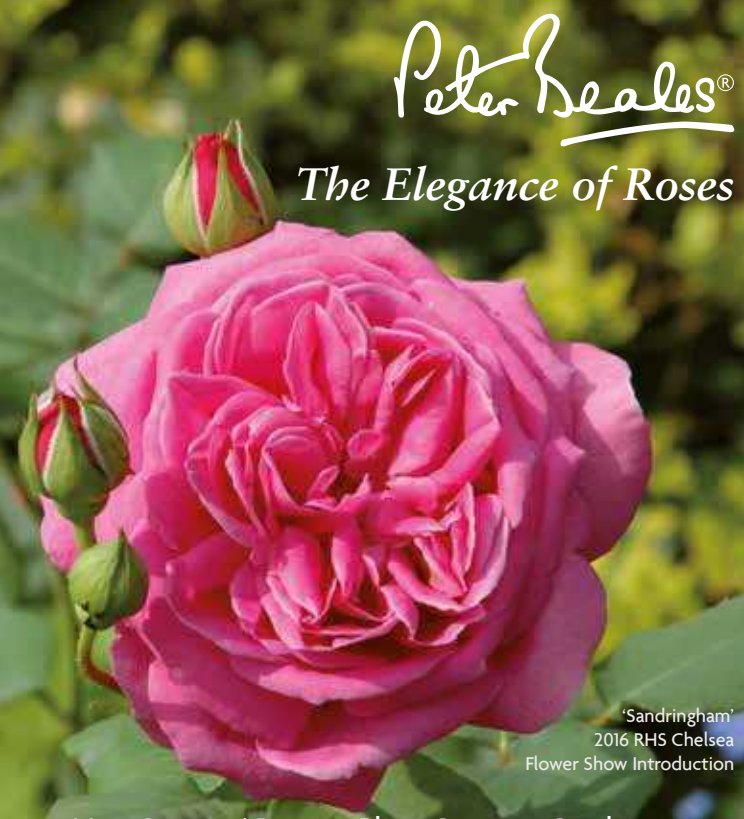


'MOUNTAIN LADY'

This recent Dutch hybrid is ideal for many gardens because it won't spread rapidly through the garden and become a nuisance. Leaves have a silvery sheen and are neat and tidy – the foliage of some grape hyacinths can be rather tatty. This is a striking variety because the flowers are large, bold and spectacular, and stands out from other grape hyacinths because of the size of its blooms. The white flowers start off green in bud, while the turquoise fertile flowers are edged with green 'teeth'. Plants can reach up to 20cm in height.

*Richard Hobbs' garden opens for the NGS on 24 April, from 11am-4pm.
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Lovable Rogues

Jane Perrone holds a soft spot for the spinach alternatives that might otherwise be considered invasive garden weeds

I must be the only gardener in the land who has tried and failed to grow ground elder. When this plant made a foray under my fence from a neighbour's garden I rather welcomed it; I'd been reading about medieval gardeners' use of *Aegopodium podagraria*, along with other weeds such as dandelion and good King Henry, as pot herbs and was keen to give it a try. Mindful of its fearsome reputation as a pernicious weed, I pulled out the tender young shoots – all two of them – and fried them up with some dandelion leaves and bacon lardons, then waited for the next wave of the invasion. It never came. The ground elder never regrew and I had to buy some variegated ground elder – both to eat, and to masquerade as a pretty garden plant, albeit coralled in a patch of almost pure gravel.

I am always looking for alternatives that offer the earthiness of spinach leaves without the annual ritual of sowing, seed trays and pricking out. Long before my failed attempts with ground elder, I had come across the idea of nettles as a food source in the 1990s, courtesy of chef turned sustainable living guru Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, back in the days when he had a luscious head of curly locks. Through television series such as *A Cook on the Wild Side* and *Escape to River Cottage*, Fearnley-Whittingstall introduced me to the concept of wild greens, including nettles (*Urtica dioica*) – there's a lovely recipe for nettle soup in his *River Cottage Cookbook*. The dangers of picking nettles from pathways and allotment edges – they are a favourite target for council workers toting backpacks full of weedkiller sprays – means I do tolerate a patch in my garden for fresh pickings of their tender tops this month; leave it longer and the leaves become stringy.

My next discovery was fat hen, or lamb's quarters as it is also known (*Chenopodium album*). Any scrap of bare soil on my allotment was quickly colonised by the floury leaved seedlings of this annual plant, and rather than seeing it as a nuisance, I channelled my inner Fearnley-Whittingstall and ate the pulled weeds instead. This is an ancient food plant indeed: seeds were found in Iron Age settlements and in the stomach of Tollund Man, the 2,000-year-old bog body whose startlingly well-preserved remains were dug up in Denmark in the 1950s. It is a chameleon of a plant, able to set

GROWING GIANT GOOSEFOOT

Expert advice from Carol Deppe, the author of several books including *The Tao of Vegetable Gardening* (Chelsea Green). See www.caroldeppe.com

Position Grow giant goosefoot in raised or regular vegetable beds. It doesn't do well in a container but adapts to different positions. Does best in full sun.

Care Seed germination is more typical of a wild plant and germination is fickle. Sow seed relatively liberally where you wish it to grow, then forget you've sown it for a year because hardly any will come up. You'll have plants the second year and every year after that.

Harvesting The entire plant is edible when it is young. The stalk toughens with age but the leaves and sideshoots are marvellous all through the summer. To prepare, chop the leaves and juicy stems, boil for two to three minutes, then drain.



Above Pick the fresh, tender tips of nettle in spring before they turn stringy and unpleasant to eat.

seed at an inch tall if conditions are poor, yet it will reach a metre or more if its seeds fall somewhere fertile. The British probably gave up eating it several hundred years ago, but once it began to appear on the menus of gastro pubs in the early 2000s, I knew its rehabilitation as a foodstuff had really begun.

Its close relative, *Chenopodium bonus-henricus*, or good King Henry, as it is more commonly known, is similar. It is another good spinach substitute but more bitter in flavour – mix it with sweeter-tasting greens that will complement its bitterness. It is untroubled by pests and diseases and easy to grow. Young shoots can be steamed like asparagus, before its leaves and flower buds are harvested later in the

A NEW LEAF

year. It will seed around if the flowers are left on the plants, and is perennial, so the original clump will come back year after year.

Fat hen is a dwarf when compared with another relative, *Chenopodium giganteum*, or giant goosefoot. Assuming you don't want to face the hard stares of your neighbours for attempting to cultivate horticultural *personae non gratae* such as ground elder, nettles and fat hen, this is your plant. Its leaves, although a similar shape and texture to fat hen, are dusted with the most vibrant purple-pink marks, particularly on young growth. This colouring explains its other name, magenta spreen, given by plant breeder Alan Kapuler, of Oregon based seed company Peace Seeds, who first introduced this plant to American gardeners.

Like fat hen, this annual hasn't yet been fully tamed by gardeners. As Carol Deppe points out in *The Tao of Vegetable Gardening* (Chelsea Green), this plant's seed dormancy mechanisms are yet to be



Left Leaves of good King Henry make a useful spinach alternative.

Below Try eating ground elder leaves, but watch its spread.

Once it appeared on the menus of gastro pubs, I knew its rehabilitation as a foodstuff had begun

bred out by domestication, hence germination under traditional seed-tray methods can be patchy. But once you allow a plant to self seed, magenta spreen will be with you forever. I never officially sow this now – the tiny black seeds are everywhere in my soil, but it is easy enough to winkle out the seedlings that pop up in the wrong place and leave the strongest growing plants. By the end of the season, the plants live up to their other name of tree spinach (not to be confused with another plant with the same common name, or, in Latin, *Cnidoscolus aconitifolius*, also known as chaya). The central stem, as thick as my thumb and strong as a bamboo cane, becomes striated with crimson, too, and makes a great pea stick next spring once the side stems are removed.

The only pest I've encountered on this plant is the telltale tunneling of the larvae of a micro moth whose common name is the flame neb (*Chrysoesthia drurella*), referring to its wings of bright rusty hue. Its larvae carve out tiny translucent mazes from inside leaves here and there on all members of the *Chenopodium* family including magenta spreen. It is rarely a major problem and affected leaves can be removed and destroyed when you pick leaves to eat.

Pinch out the top, and magenta spreen will branch again and again, producing plenty of side shoots from which to harvest the young leaves. Several plants will provide you with a weekly or even daily supply of greens for salads and cooking, right up to the first frosts.



RECIPE: MAGENTA SPREEN PATTIES

Julia Sich is an edible weed expert and educator who lives in Tauranga, New Zealand. Julia runs workshops on the nutritional and medicinal value of weeds, and more of her recipes and advice can be found at www.juliasedibleweeds.com. Of magenta spreen she says: "The underside of the leaves and top of the new leaves are covered in a fine pink dust. Resist the temptation to wash it off as it is full of calcium and protein."

Serves 2

INGREDIENTS

1 cup chickpea or yellow pea flour
1 ½ tsp curry powder or cumin
½ tsp baking powder
½ tsp salt
2 cups finely chopped magenta spreen, loosely packed down
2 tbsp grated onion
Water
Oil (coconut or olive) for frying

METHOD

- Whisk dry ingredients together. Add greens and grated onion.
- Mix to a very thick, dry batter. Add just enough water to bind the mixture
- Heat 1 cm of oil in a heavy-bottomed frying pan over medium-high heat.
- Mould the patties into small cakes and drop them into the hot oil. When golden brown on the underside, turn each patty and fry on the other side. ■

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SUMMER BULBS

START OFF SUMMER BULBS

Pot up a selection of beautiful
summer-flowering bulbs now
and be rewarded with colourful
eye-catching flowers for
borders, containers and cutting

Clockwise from top left
Well-behaved Begonia boliviensis;
scented *Gladiolus murielae*;
dusky *Gladiolus papilio*;
Eucomis 'Zeal Bronze'.

SUMMER BULBS

Planting bulbs in autumn provides one of gardening's most joyous rewards: new life bursting forth in spring, all the result of some light pottering with a trowel. That joy can be repeated in summer too, by planting summer-flowering bulbs in spring. Invest a little time planting the bulbs now and a host of refined and beautiful flowers will give the garden an extra floral flourish.

Bulbs that flower in summer are not as hardy as those that flower in spring, preferring warmer conditions before producing the first signs of life. To start the plants into growth this month a greenhouse, conservatory or warm windowsill comes in handy. Alternatively, plant them straight into warm soil in May.

The diversity of flower shape and colour in summer bulbs is wide and while many are bold and bright, others possess an old-fashioned elegance. Among dahlias alone there are cultivars that deliver dazzling colour or subtle varieties for old-world charm, and that is before other summer bulbs are considered. For flowers from a bygone era, gladioli offer a nostalgic touch. They are tremendous plants for bringing grace to a mixed flower border in late summer with graceful species and forms as well as the traditional, large-flowered Dutch types normally sold as cut flowers. With good staking, these choice gladioli can create excellent impact in the border despite taking up little space.



Above Dahlias are available in a great variety of colours and flower shapes, with varieties to suit every planting scheme.

Opposite Dainty sparaxis is an ideal candidate for a potted centrepiece.

Compared to the archetypal image of a gladioli, the Abyssinian gladiolus *Gladiolus murielae* is cut from a more refined cloth, with nodding, pure white, fragrant flowers and deep maroon centres. Blooms are small in number but of a high quality. Equally elegant but with purple-green hooded petals is *Gladiolus papilio*. Purple and gold on the inside, its blooms are almost reminiscent of a hybrid hellebore and appear in late summer.

For something similar but daintier, try gorgeously

GROWING SUMMER BULBS

Start plants off under glass but wait until the risk of frost has passed if planting outside

Most summer bulbs need to be grown in a warm, frost-free environment. A heated greenhouse or a warm windowsill indoors is the perfect place to start these plants into steady growth. Pot individual bulbs into containers of multi-purpose compost just wider than the bulb itself. Water sparingly until the bulbs start to shoot into growth, then water each time the compost is dry.

Gradually accustom the resulting young plants to outside conditions after all risk of frost has gone, then plant in their permanent positions. Check the final height and spread of the plants, taking care to leave enough room between each plant. Planting closely increases the risk of fungal

diseases such as mildew and botrytis in warm, humid conditions.

The majority of summer bulbs prefer a site that is free-draining and south-facing. If soil drainage is poor, the bulbs can rot, and lack of sun can mean lack of flowers. Put grit into each planting hole if soil is heavy. A mulch of garden compost or well-rotted manure over the soil a month before planting will help aid thin, poor soils, by improving fertility and drainage.

Bulbs can be planted directly into warm soil in the garden, too, after all risk of frost has passed. Each bulb should be planted at a depth of twice its height. In containers, use soil-based John Innes compost mixed with one part grit to three parts compost.





scented freesias. They may be small but they will fill a room with perfume. Provided you use prepared, heat-treated corms to break their dormancy, freesias will flower in late summer when started into growth indoors in spring. It can be worth checking whether they are treated with the supplier.

Another familiar summer bulb, technically a tuber, is the begonia. This can be tricky to incorporate in the garden without it looking like the black sheep of the border but *Begonia boliviensis* bucks the trend. With long slender blooms, it is far more refined than many of its brash, larger flowered cousins. It has impeccable manners, with a graceful, gently cascading growth habit and not as ungainly as the bigger bloomed, hanging basket types. Flowers naturally fall from the plant when spent, so the floral display always shows sharp and vibrant colour.

Just as bright and vibrantly coloured but as light as a feather is sparaxis, also known as the harlequin flower. A perfect plant for containers, it is often sold as a mix of colours, each flower appearing hand-painted and standing out among slim, strappy leaves. In a pot of gritty, free-draining compost this can be a delightful centrepiece for a summer picnic table.

Eucomis bicolor, the pineapple lily, is large and exotic yet at the same time delicate and charming. The poker-like flower stems look uncomplicated from a distance but closer inspection reveals the jewel-like detail of the starry flowers. 'Sparkling Burgundy' is justly popular, with purple-edged blooms and leaves. The first shoots emerge covered in trademark maroon mottling, which decorates the flower stems all through the season. ■

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HEDYCHIUM

Flowering in September and beyond, ginger lilies grow well in semi-shade. *H. gardnerianum* is the hardiest.



IXIA

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RHODOHYPOXIS

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TIGRIDIA

This speckly bloomed bulb is a true summer show-off and produces a bright splash of multi-colour in late summer.

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Tasks Under Glass

Time spent in the greenhouse now – re-potting, propagating and sowing for early indoor colour – will offer abundant reward in a few short weeks

The greenhouse in spring is a place of industry, with seed trays, pots and bags of compost the main centrepieces, but it can be the home of beautiful flowering plants, too. The Glasshouse at RHS Garden Wisley is the perfect stage for a range of plants that will add colour and scent under glass in spring. This year's displays in the Glasshouse will be a treat – and a trick – for the senses, with luxurious summer colour and scent filling the space when spring is only just beginning to gather pace.

“We want to inspire visitors with a range of plantings that you don't normally see in flower in spring,” says Glasshouse supervisor Peter Jones.

“There is such a variety of plants that can flower early indoors if you force them, such as sweet peas and stocks. A good pot of stocks will fill a greenhouse with scent. They have such a strong fragrance, it will knock your socks off in April,” says Peter, who has overseen Colour From Seeds, a display held at Wisley this spring (see page 105).

As well as watering and deadheading all the flowering plants, this month is also a time for planning ahead to ensure that the greenhouse is a beautiful and productive place in summer too. This is time to take cuttings, re-pot orchids and sow seeds for more flowers and vegetables, as the greenhouse growing season begins in earnest.

Above The expansive glasshouse at RHS Wisley covers an area the size of 10 tennis courts.

RE-POTTING ORCHIDS

Once orchids have finished flowering from towards the end of April, they move into active growth. This is the time to relocate them or reposition them in an existing home.

Most orchids need re-potting every three years. “As they grow, clump-forming orchids such as cymbidiums start to multiply by forming pseudobulbs. This means that the plant effectively ‘moves’ away from the centre of the pot and fills all the available space. This can make watering difficult and reduce the vigour of the plant,” explains Peter. Gently push the plants out of their pots and remove two thirds of the

pseudobulbs from the edge of the plant before re-potting.

Non-clump forming orchids such as *Phalaenopsis* (moth orchids) should be repotted when they have outgrown their pots. “Remove one third of the roots, including any brown, dead ones, along with any dead leaves,” Peter advises. “Then re-pot at the same planting depth into a mix of bark-based orchid compost and sphagnum moss to retain moisture.”

If a bigger plant is wanted, plant it up into the next size pot to give the roots more room to develop. If not re-pot the plant into the same sized pot.



1



2



3

1. Cut out any brown roots once the orchid is removed from its pot. 2. Place the plant at the depth it was before and fill the area around its roots with growing medium. 3. Pack orchid compost or sphagnum moss down into the roots to anchor the plant.

Orchids to repot in spring



CYMBIDIUM

A cool-growing orchid that flowers between autumn and spring if kept shaded from direct sun.



ONCIDIUM

Hybrids need a minimum temperature of 10°C in winter, which is when they brighten up a north-facing windowsill.



ZYGOPETALUM

An east-facing position is best for this highly scented orchid which should be kept between 17-23°C.



THE WISLEY GLASSHOUSE

Covering an area of 3,000 square metres and reaching 12m in height, the Wisley Glasshouse opened to the public in 2007 and houses the largest collection of cultivated glasshouse plants in the UK. Overlooking the Wisley lake and famous Piet Oudolf borders, the glasshouse is split into three climatic zones: dry temperate, moist temperate and tropical. The Colour from Seeds display in the glasshouse runs from 26 March to 24 April.

RHS Garden Wisley, Wisley Lane, Wisley, Woking GU23 6QB. See www.rhs.org.uk/wisley

Taking softwood cuttings

“Most of the propagation in the greenhouse at Wisley is done through cuttings,” says Peter. “Cuttings of tender perennials are taken from mother plants that were grown from cuttings in the previous year, so none of the plants we propagate is old or lacking vigour.” The cuttings compost used at Wisley is fine and free-draining, and cuttings themselves are given bottom heat and kept under polythene to keep the humidity high.

Select cuttings material from soft, young growth. “Use a propagation knife to cut just below a pair of leaves to result in a short cutting 3-4cm long with two pairs of leaves. We dip all our cuttings in hormone rooting powder, except those of *Pelargonium* (it can burn their stems). We also leave the cuttings for 10 minutes to form a callous on the cut surfaces. Then they’re inserted into pots of free-draining compost mixed with perlite,” says Peter. Water gently and place under milky polythene to raise humidity and reduce water loss. Keep cuttings at 20-25°C until rooted, then at a nighttime minimum of 10°C and at 15°C during the day.

1. Select young, disease-free growth to use as your cuttings material **2.** Make a clean cut just below the lowest pair of leaves which should be removed. **3.** Remove the growing tip of the cutting to leave a 3-4cm length that has two pairs of leaves.



1



2



3

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Annuals to sow for early colour

It is the sweet peas that are the real showstoppers in Wisley's Colour From Seeds display. "Five autumn-sown seedlings are grown in 20-litre pots and they reach around 1.8m in height by April," says Peter. All the plants in the Colour from Seeds display are housed in containers of peat-free compost comprising coir, composted bark and loam.

Cultivars of sweet pea that have the ability to flower early were sown under glass at the end of October. "We sow sweet peas into a nutrient-poor, seed compost that is light and coir-based. It is peat free with a touch of vermiculite added," explains Peter.

The sweet peas 'Solstice Crimson', 'Pink Nines' and 'Selene' were chosen for their early flowering potential.

These were kept on a greenhouse bench at 18-20°C to encourage quick germination. Once seedlings appeared, they were then kept at a temperature of 12°C during the day and 8°C at night.

From the end of December they were 'warmed up' in the greenhouse at a temperature of 20°C in order to bring them into flower for March.

ANNUALS TO SOW NOW FOR SUMMER GREENHOUSE FLOWERS



CINERARIA

Dome-shaped plants that can flower in February if sown in late summer, with flowers in purple, blue, red and pink.



CAMPANULA MEDIUM

The delicate Canterbury bell is a must-have in a classic English greenhouse display, full of cottage garden charm.



MATTHIOLA INCANA

Scented stocks can fill a greenhouse with perfume from early spring and do the same trick in borders in summer.



PRIMULA MALACOIDES

Smothered in tiers of dainty blossom, this delightfully old-fashioned primula can flower any month of the year.



SALPIGLOSSIS

These trumpet flowers will add an exotic flavour to containers and flower until the first frosts.



SCHIZANTHUS

Low-growing plants that lend themselves to being grown in pots, so the flowers can be easily enjoyed.



VEGETABLES TO SOW UNDER GLASS NOW

Chillies, tomatoes and aubergines are best sown this month in the greenhouse to give fruits plenty of time to mature before the end of summer. Sow these summer-fruited vegetables in pots or trays of multi-purpose compost and place them in a propagator at a temperature of 20-25°C. Sow on the surface of damp compost and just cover the seed with a layer of sieved vermiculite or perlite. The seeds should germinate in 10 days. Remove the cover from the propagator and keep the seedlings on a well-lit windowsill at 18-20°C. Once the seedlings have their first pair of true leaves, they are ready to be transplanted into individual, 5cm pots of multi-purpose compost.

Left Chilli seedlings need a warm and sheltered environment after germination to grow well.

Watering

"You are more likely to overwater a plant in the greenhouse in early spring than underwater it," says Peter. "Don't forget that at this time of year it is still relatively cold. We check every plant daily for its watering needs by making an assessment of each plant. The first thing to do is look outside and see if it is sunny or cloudy. Then, ask yourself whether the plant has any leaf adaptations such as silvery foliage, which means it is able to retain water for longer than those with soft, green growth.

"Look at the foliage and see if it is wilting or fully turgid. At this point we lift each plant to feel the weight and we'll feel the compost with our hands to check if the plant needs more water. If the plant feels light or if the compost is powdery and dry it indicates that water is needed. Our rule of thumb for watering at Wisley is, 'if in doubt don't water, but recheck later in the day'."

Right Check plants for watering individually. Pots dry out at different rates and it is easy to lose plants by letting roots get waterlogged.




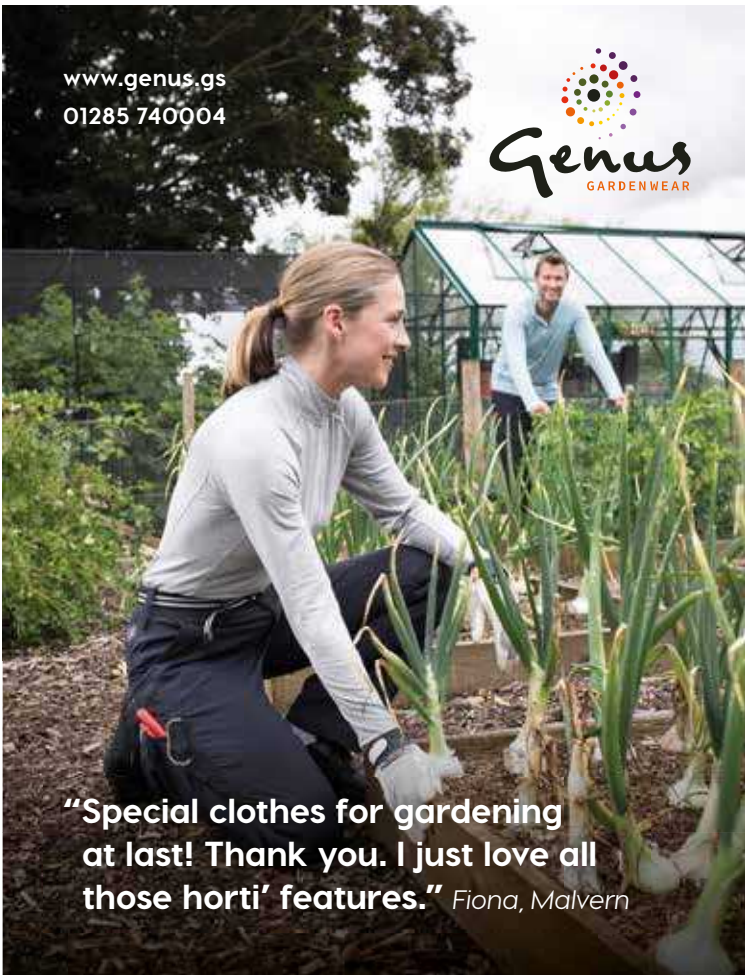
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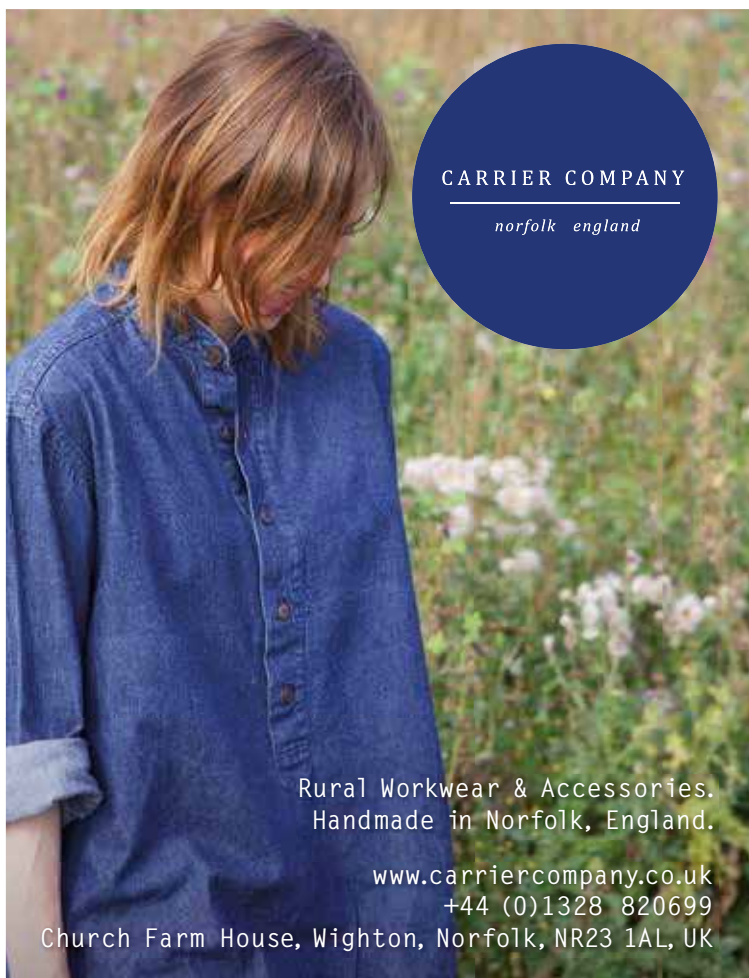
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Moments in Time

An age-old pursuit currently enjoying popular favour, flower pressing is a satisfying way to capture the garden's beauty for years to come

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHS **NICOLA STOCKEN**



Placing favourite garden flowers between layers of tissue in a dedicated press is the best way to preserve them.

FLOWER PRESSING

There are few more easily accessible garden crafts than flower pressing. All that is needed is a handful of small flowers, some fine foliage, tissue paper and a heavy old book – traditionally this would often be a Bible or volume of music. Many common garden flowers are ideal for pressing but so, too, is the variety of wildflowers and fern-like leaves that may be gathered from meadows and country hedgerows provided they are not protected.

Never a week passes without there being something to press. Winter brings common snowdrops and silvery lilac crocuses so delicate that, when pressed, they're almost translucent. Come spring and there are sweet violets and celandines to be picked in woodland, and as the year progresses the selection of both garden and wildflowers broadens.

The simplest flowers to press are slim and exquisitely detailed – cow parsley, pimpinella, the heads of delicate wild grasses, hardy geraniums, bellflowers, alchemilla and forget-me-nots – but even those with bulkier heads will flatten well without falling apart. Love-in-a-mist, violas, lavender, dog roses, mallows and any number of daisy-like flowers may all be preserved.

For centuries, to press a flower was a means of



Above With their pretty 'faces', violas are ideal for pressing.

Left Flower presses that apply an even, central pressure are the best kind.

capturing the loveliness of a particular season and saving it for years to come. It became especially popular among Victorians, who often pressed flowers as a keepsake of a special moment – Valentine's Day flowers, perhaps, or a few cherished blooms from a wedding bouquet. Old collections of verse sometimes fall open at a page where once a flower was placed. Such floral treasures may be faded and frail, but they retain a nostalgic beauty that age cannot dull.

Flower pressing is currently in vogue not only as a children's hobby but also as a satisfying craft offering enchanting results for little effort or cost. It is also very easy to do, providing the flowers are correctly prepared and both light and moisture are removed while they are stored in the press.

Some flowers press better than others, although there are no hard and fast rules. While the colour of certain blooms will fade, especially if exposed to light, there are others that retain their vibrancy. Only white flowers have little to gain or lose.

Bulkier flowers should be flattened gently with a finger prior to pressing, then, during the first week of pressing, increase the pressure of the press a little each day. There are pros and cons as to whether to lay the flowers right side up or face down. Either way, take great care not to crease the flower when lowering the upper piece of paper onto it. Whether using books or a traditional press, the type of paper in direct contact with the flowers must be absorbent. Blotting paper is ideal, but fine tissue sandwiched between layers of newspaper also works well. Avoid using kitchen roll because the paper's texture will be imprinted



Pressing Matters

Create your own pressed flower keepsakes from the garden for a long-lasting reminder of its floral bounty



STEP 1: Gather only the newest and freshest flowers when they are dry – ideally, once early morning dew has dried but before the sun causes flowers wilt. Press each gently onto the paper.



STEP 2: Group flowers of a similar size and structure together because they will dry at the same rate. Ensure they are not touching, or they will stick together.



STEP 3: Traditionally, flowers were pressed between blotting paper slipped into the pages of a heavy book. Various styles of flower press available today, but it is best to choose one that distributes pressure evenly as it is applied.



STEP 4: Place fresh flowers onto the surface of a piece of blotting paper or plain tissue paper, laid on top of a piece of stiff cardboard. Avoid using kitchen roll as its bobbly texture will be imprinted onto the flowers.



STEP 5: Lower a top sheet of tissue or blotting paper very carefully over the flowers, to avoid moving them. If the flowers inadvertently touch, they will stick together and both specimens will be ruined. (Continued on page 115)



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onto fragile petals. A traditional flower press comes stocked with a sandwich of clean, absorbent paper, which makes it possible to press a few layers at a time. Meanwhile, most basic presses consist of two square pieces of wood, with wing nuts at each corner. Others operate with a single, centralised spindle, ensuring an even pressure throughout the area.

The flowers are key, and must be perfect dry specimens. Wet flowers become mouldy, so pick them with long stalks early on a dry day and press quickly, before they wilt. Trim the backs of bulky flowers because these will contain more moisture. They will benefit from having the tissue paper changed after a week.

Most flowers take between two and three weeks to flatten and dry fully but this process can be hastened by using a microwave. Place the flowers between two sheets of tissue in a plain-fronted book (no metallic embossing on the cover), and give them 10 half-minute bursts at full power. Open the book to allow water vapour to escape between each burst and to check their progress – different flowers require different lengths of ‘cooking’ time. When done, they’ll feel dry but not crisp. Finally, place the flowers in another book and press normally for a few days only.

Pressed flowers, complemented with leaves and grasses, can be used for various craft projects. Greetings cards, bookmarks or pictures may all be created by first arranging flowers onto paper or fabric before gluing each into position. Dried plant material lasts longer if sealed with a UV-resistant acrylic preserving spray or several coats of Mod Podge, the all-in-one glue, sealer and finish. Leaves and petals can also be applied to wooden furniture using a technique called *découpage* – the material is glued to the surface, and then sealed with layers of varnish.

Above Use a finger to flatten bulkier flowers, making sure neighbouring petals or leaves do not touch each.



STEP 6: Three sheets of fresh flowers are now stacked one on top of another, each layer separated by squares of stiff card. Finally, the wooden top plate goes into position.



STEP 7: Pressure is applied onto the solid wooden top plate, distributing pressure evenly onto the sheets of flowers beneath. Don't fully tighten at first, but leave a small adjustment to add more pressure during the first few days.



STEP 8: After two to three weeks, the flowers will be fully dried. It is interesting to see how the bright pinks of the mallows and hardy geraniums have darkened to blue.

EASY FLOWERS TO PRESS

There are many common flowers, both cultivated and wild, that last well and are easy to press. These are among the best for the task



LAVENDER (*Lavandula angustifolia*) makes a strong pressed flower, lovely made into a laminated bookmark to insert into a favourite volume.



CORN MARIGOLD (*Chrysanthemum segetum*), a daisy-like cornfield wildflower, bearing golden flower heads on branching stems.



RAGGED ROBIN (*Lychnis flos-cuculi*), crops up on grass verges and in meadows. Its toothed, pink flowers are loved by bees and butterflies.



COMMON MALLOW (*Malva sylvestris*) bears pretty pink flowers all summer. Take care when laying out the paper-thin flowers for pressing.



PIMPINELLA (*Pimpinella major* 'Rosea'), a cow parsley-like perennial with finely cut leaves borne on stiff stems bearing flat pink flowers.



LOVE-IN-THE-MIST (*Nigella damascena*) flowers are tricky to press without breaking the petals – the key is to flatten with a finger prior to pressing.



FEVERFEW (*Tanacetum parthenium*) is a self-seeding, herbaceous perennial that produces white, daisy-like flowers throughout summer.



PURPLE TOP (*Verbena bonariensis*) is a lanky, self-seeding perennial with purple flowers. They tend to fade significantly when pressed.



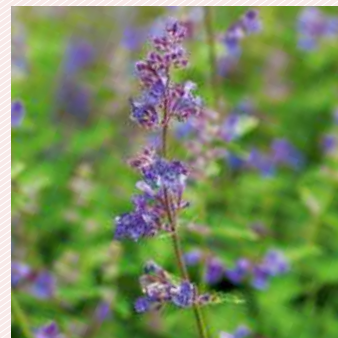
SWEET VIOLETS (*Viola odorata*) offer scented violet flowers in early spring above deep green, heart-shaped leaves that also press well.



COW PARSLEY or **QUEEN ANNE'S LACE** (*Anthriscus sylvestris*) is beautiful in the wild. Its delicate blooms make a lovely, lacy pressed flower.



CORN COCKLE (*Agrostemma githago*) bears large, pink flowers surrounded by long, pointed sepals, giving a star-like appearance to this plant.



CATMINT (*Nepeta racemosa*) is an aromatic perennial that sends up spikes of pretty blue flowers that press easily and retain a hint of the fragrance. ■

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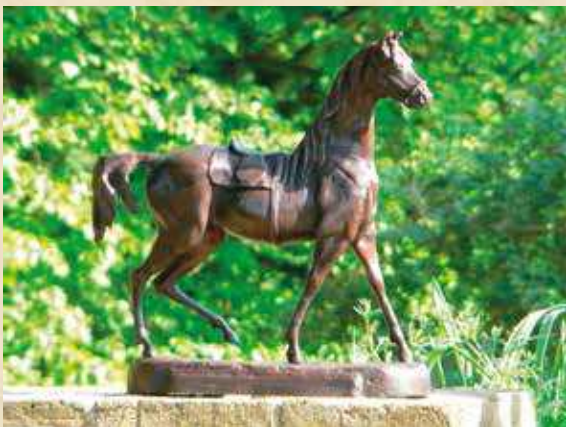
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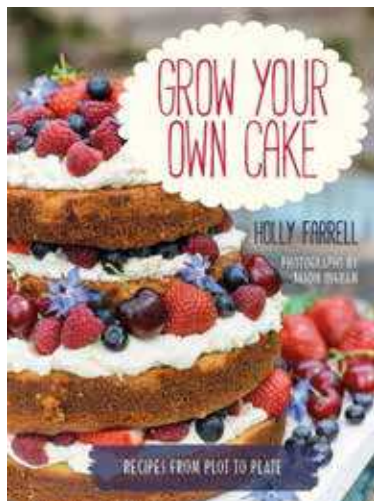
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The Reviewer

A selection of the best garden writing to appear this month



Grow Your Own Cake

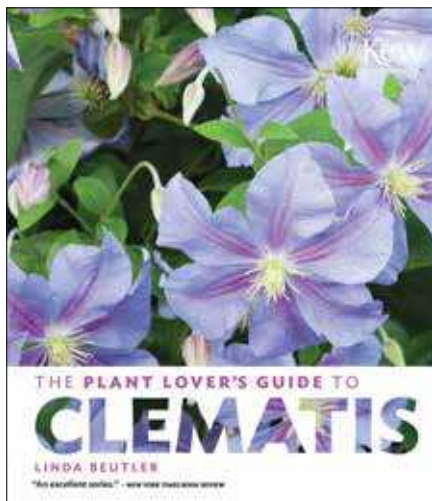
By Holly Farrell

Frances Lincoln, £16.99

We all know that gardens and cake go together. No visit to a beautiful garden would be complete without an equally appealing slice of something special in the adjoining tearoom, after all. This book takes that perfect marriage a step further by delving into growing your own produce specifically for baking.

The images are inspiring, the recipes straightforward and easy to follow. You can pick your cakes by season or from the chapters on afternoon tea, puddings and savoury bakes. The growing advice is sound and enthusiastic, particularly for those new to growing their own. There is a helpful section of general advice at the front of the work, with more detailed information on individual crops to accompany the recipes. Although good, this is succinct and new gardeners may need to seek further advice as they grow.

If you can already produce plentiful trusses of tomatoes, though, whip up a warm batch of tomato cupcakes. Use blueberries to make a towering layered sponge slathered with frosting, bake crumbly lavender shortbread, or beetroot brownies. There is no shortage of naughty, mouth-watering treats here, making this book a scrumptious addition to the bookshelf of any gardener-cook.



The Plant Lover's Guide to Clematis

By Linda Beutler

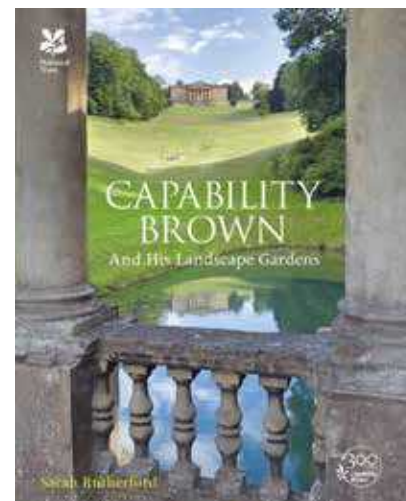
Timber Press, £17.99

This work gets off to a tremendous start in showing how different clematis can be cunningly planted among other plants in the garden and in containers. It depicts this often-isolated plant as a more social garden subject that can be incorporated into the wider garden, rather than restricted to a lonely position on a trellis.

To help narrow down the search when it comes selecting a clematis to grow, the body of the book is a directory of 196 clematis species and cultivars. Each form is profiled with detailed but accessible notes on how to grow each one at its best, with anecdotes from the author's experience. All the clematis are photographed, too, to help gardeners make an informed choice.

Advice on growing, propagating and pruning follows. The explanation of how to divide these plants is especially useful for a gardener looking to increase their stock.

In both the practical and inspirational content, the title of the book is very apt in that the author's love of the plant in question comes through loud and clear on every page. The variations of this much-loved but under-discovered genus are celebrated and explained in such a way that it may just move closer to the top of one's plant wish list.



Capability Brown: And His Landscape Gardens

By Sarah Rutherford

National Trust Books, £20

Beautifully illustrated, this coffee table tome is essential reading for anyone interested in learning about the remarkable career of Lancelot 'Capability' Brown. Each chapter relies on detailed research to examine a different facet of Brown's legacy. Starting from his humble origins as a steward's son in remote Northumberland, it examines his rise to eminence and provides insight into the influences that shaped his career.

Much of the book focuses on the unique relationships that Brown forged with some of England's most powerful 18th-century figures, and his extraordinary portfolio of wealthy clientele makes for fascinating reading. Rutherford seeks to explain Brown's enduring appeal by setting out a list of 'essential ingredients' for his success. In doing so, she demonstrates a masterful knowledge of his particular architectural style and offers a unique perceptive into the methods and processes that went into his famous landscape designs.

Contemporary photographs and colourful illustrations act as useful markers throughout the book and its easy-to-read, accessible style make it the perfect companion to the celebration of Capability Brown's work taking place this year.

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Q&A

Brent Elliott, historian at the RHS Lindley Library, notes roses' fascinating past



How would you describe your book?

Sceptical and funny, I hope. There is an immense wealth of writing about roses that has fallen below the radar today, because it appeared in magazines rather than books, from the *Gardeners' Chronicle* to the *Rose Annual* to the *Journal des Roses*. I have tried to indicate the delights of this literature by generous quotation.

How did you narrow down such a large group of plants to just 40?

Very few of the entries are about a single variety of rose: most of them deal with categories of roses, such as Bourbons, Noisettes, Hybrid Perpetuals, Hybrid Teas. So there will be more than one named variety in most of the sections.

Which of the roses has the most amusing story?

I am fond of the story of William Paul. The rose nurseryman from Waltham Cross, seeing his first Hybrid Perpetual ('La Reine') in the Laffay nursery near Paris around 1842, stepped on one of Laffay's new seedlings in attempts to get a better view of it.

What has been the most influential rose discovery on the English garden today?

This must undoubtedly be the introduction of the

Chinese roses at the beginning of the 19th century. As a result, no matter which category of rose you consider, you can take for granted that there is a far broader range of colours available than in previous centuries, alongside repeat flowering in many varieties, too.

When were roses most popular with gardeners?

The period from the mid-19th century to the Second World War was the period in which the enthusiasm for new varieties, and the creation of new categories, of roses was at its peak. The competition and the controversies between growers exceeded anything we see today.

What do you think is the biggest myth surrounding roses?

This must certainly be their antiquity. There are all sorts of stories about the roses of the ancient world, of Crusaders introducing particular species to Europe, of varieties associated with particular incidents in the Middle Ages, such as the Wars of the Roses. When you look closely at the records, the stories evaporate into thin air. Never trust any story about particular varieties of rose before the 19th century – this is because many of the tales about roses in earlier centuries were made up in the 19th century.

What was the most interesting discovery you made when researching the book?

I think this must be the delights of the range of literature on roses. I certainly never expected to write a book on the subject. For one thing, I have a terrible sense of smell: you could walk me blindfold through a rose garden and I might not notice anything. For another, the greatest experts on roses, including Graham Thomas and Charles Quest-Ritson, have been regular users of the RHS Lindley Library over the years, so with their expertise on hand, I found little need to explore the rose literature in detail. But it has been great fun going back and hearing the voices of the great rosarians as communicated by the printed page: their triumphs, their combativeness, their occasional buffoonery – all of which I hope the reader will relish in turn. ■



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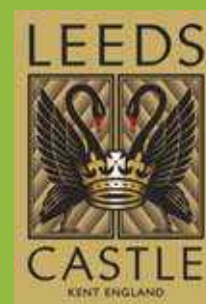
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Tel: +44 (0)1332 862502 | Email: info@melbournehall.com | Website: www.melbournehallgardens.com

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OPEN: Daily from 10am, last admission 4.30pm.

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OPEN: See website for opening dates throughout the year.



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Natural Selection

Katherine Swift discovers a way to protect an ageing boundary wall and provide habitat for small garden wildlife at the same time

Recently I have been struggling with a dilemma. On the western boundary of my garden is an old garden wall, about 1.5m high, made of local grey rubble sandstone and bound with crumbling lime mortar. It is about 100m long and may once have been taller, for it has no capping on the top. The whole thing is festooned with ivy (*Hedera helix*).

Ivy is one of those plants that have both juvenile and mature foliage. Its mature stems have larger, glossier, unlobed leaves, and bear enormous heads of yellowy green flowers in autumn and early winter, followed by handsome black berries. I know I should remove the ivy, which threatens to pull down the wall. However, the flowers are a vital late food source for many pollinating insects, including my bees, and the aphid-devouring striped hoverflies which masquerade as tiny wasps. Some butterflies, too, depend upon the ivy, such as the lovely holly blue (*Celastrina argiolus*) which feasts on nearby holly flowers in summer and the ivy in autumn.

The birds also love it. Last summer the nuthatch had his larder in one clump, and the robin nested deep in the shelter of another. In winter the berries provide food for blackbirds and thrushes, and the evergreen foliage provides them with shelter and roosting sites, as well as a place for hibernating butterflies to sleep until spring.



In time, ferns, stonecrops and other mat-forming species like sedums and ivy-leaved toadflax will colonise the wall as the turf decays

The destructive power of ivy is in any case over-rated. As long as the ivy does not penetrate the structure of a wall there is no harm done, and its strong twining trunks can often support and protect tottering structures and fragile older trees. However, in this instance, the ivy's tenacious roots probing the loose, uncapped upper surface and rubble interior of the garden wall spelled trouble; reluctantly, I resolved to remove it.

But what happens to the wall now? I can't afford to cap it with cut-stone slabs, and I don't want to seal it with concrete or hard mortar.

'Soft capping' is a solution pioneered by Historic England (a new division of English Heritage) to stabilise and protect old walls by encouraging the growth of low-growing grasses and wild flowers in a layer of soil and turf along the top. Even as little as 5cm of soil will protect the top of the wall against damage from frost and rain, reduce destructive temperature variations inside it, and form an attractive feature in its own right.

The trick is to lay the turf grass-side down, hanging over the wall, pile the soil on top, then fold the overhanging turf right-side up over the soil, rather like making a Cornish pasty. The turves can then be secured in place with split pieces of cane. I am going to use turf cut from the wilder parts of my garden, to act as a seed bank, rather than commercial turf, which is grown in sterilised soil.

Then I shall sit back and wait. In time, ferns, stonecrops and other mat-forming species like sedums, ivy-leaved toadflax, annuals such as rue-leaved saxifrage, perhaps even harebells, certainly clovers, will colonise the wall as the turf decays.

I may have lost my picturesque ivy-clad walls, but I have gained 100m of exciting new garden habitat – even if it is less than half a metre wide – which should attract a wide range of insects new to the garden, and the birds and other creatures which feed upon them: a whole new ecosystem in fact. ■



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